



# IMMIGRATION STORIES



Editors: Batuhan Erdi Şahin  
Ümit Topçuoğlu



Avrupa  
Birliği  
sivil  
düşün

# **IMMIGRATION STORIES**

# IMMIGRATION STORIES

International Students and Education Association

*Editors: Batuhan Erdi Şahin, Ümit Topcuoğlu*

## **Broadcasting Committee:**

Berna Uğur Türksöy

Büşra Yıldız Türkeri

İrem Dinçok

Selinay İlgaz

Utkuhan Yıldırım

Yaşar Çiçek

Yunus Emre Salmaşur

Translator: Emel Kurt

Cover Photo: Eren Geçer

*“This book has been prepared with the support of the European Union within the scope of the European Union Think Civil Programme. The responsibility of the content rests entirely with the International Students and Education Association and does not reflect the views of the EU.”*

Immigration Stories book has been prepared by the International Students and Education Association with the support of the European Union Think Civil Program. Within the scope of the project, the life stories of 30 refugee students studying in Turkey were compiled. We would like to thank Mr. Eyüp Yaşar and Mr. Adem Arkadaş for their unwavering support throughout the project process.

International Students and Education Association

# **FORCEDMIGRATION, IMMIGRANT STORIES AND ROUTES**

## **Introduction**

As we are about to reach the quarter of the 21st century, the phenomenon of migration, which has developed on a global scale and has caused the material and spiritual values of humanity to be questioned, and has become a common concern of humanity, constitutes one of the important problems of our country. The phenomenon of migration and the concept of migration are classified under various types in an extremely wide range and discussed within the framework of different disciplines.

The phenomenon of migration, which includes human mobility in general, defines the movement of people from one place to another due to social, political or economic reasons. An international relocation is not necessary to talk about the existence of the phenomenon of migration. The settlement of people in a city other than the city they live in is also included in the concept of migration. Forced migration is the movement made to protect the right to life as a

result of human or natural events from where people live. The biggest example we can give to forced migration is the Syrian immigrants who took refuge in Turkey. However, forced migration to Turkey is not limited to Syria, Afghanistan, Iran etc. includes countries. Recently, many foundations, associations, research center and non-governmental organizations in Turkey continue to work on migrant issues and include different focus groups in research from different aspects. Books, reports, articles and visual materials published as a result of these researches are shared with the public and public authorities and solutions are offered. Our work called “Immigration Stories” goes beyond traditional approaches; it includes hearing the life stories of immigrants from the first hand, being in touch with their problems and empathizing with them. Let's also point out that our focus group is the “lucky” group of immigrants, so to speak: It is a group that has received undergraduate and graduate education in Turkey, has been able to organize itself in a way, and keeps their hopes for the future alive. The interviews in this book are not of the kind that will surprise you about the problems, human rights violations, poverty and needs that these people face in Turkey. But today, the stories of these

people, who have somehow established their own order as students, have a history full of tears, blood, gunfire, exploding bombs, terror, and fear of losing their relatives, pain and deprivation.

In our study, there are stories adapted from face-to-face interviews with 30 immigrant students living in Karabuk, Kayseri, Afyonkarahisar, Istanbul and Ankara, leaving their countries due to forced migration, and receiving undergraduate or graduate education. The interviews were carried out in accordance with the conditions of the epidemic, which started in March 2020 and still continues on a global scale. During the interview, the opinion of the immigrant student was taken about what information will be included in the study and no other information was included. The information obtained during the interviews was later turned into a story. In the stories, the reasons why young people left their countries, how the migration process developed, why they preferred Turkey and the problems they faced were included. Twenty-four of the thirty university students in our focus group are male and six are female. Nineteen of these students are from Syria, seven from Afghanistan, two from Iraq, and the other two from Yemen. Therefore, 21 of them came from the border country with Turkey, and the

rest came from countries that can be considered geographically distant.

Each of the thirty different students, of course, has a different story; but the common concern of all of them is to overcome financial problems, to have a financial income to make a living and to continue their education and training. Faced with the burning and destructive face of terrorism and war, these people had no choice but to leave the lands where they were born and grew up. Of course, it is difficult to immigrate, to leave their settled order and come to countries they have never known, to leave their family, to get a university, to establish a self-order. However, the only thing that motivates young people in overcoming these difficulties is their hopes for the future and the dreams they want to realize. After all the poverty, oppression, violence and terror they have experienced in their country, the difficulties they face in Turkey as a refugee are mild; They emphasize this point over and over again.

## **International Migration Mobility and Turkey**

Contrary to what is known, the legal status of immigrant students in Turkey who do not have an education visa and are in the focus group of this study is not “refugee”. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: *“someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”* The definition in this contract has been prepared with narrow content. According to the convention, a time limit has been introduced to become a refugee. However, it is not clarified where and how the persecution will come from the persecuted person or persons. The time limit introduced in the Geneva Convention is stipulated in Article 1 of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees signed by the United Nations *“For the purposes of this*

*Convention, the words "events occurring before 1 January 1951" in article 1, section A, shall be understood to mean either (a) "events occurring in Europe before 1 January 1951"; or (b) "events occurring in Europe or elsewhere before 1 January 1951"; and each Contracting State shall make a declaration at the time of signature, ratification or accession, specifying which of these meanings it applies for the purpose of its obligations under this Convention."* removed in accordance with the provision. Within the scope of this protocol signed, in the period after January 1, 1951, people who comply with the definition of refugee in the 1951 Geneva Convention were granted refugee status.

According to Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, everyone has the right to seek and be admitted to other countries under constant pressure. Like the Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not explain from whom and in what form this constant oppression or persecution would come. In the second paragraph of Article 14, it is stated that *"This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations."* In

addition, Article 13 of the Declaration mentions that people can reside in any state and freedom of movement. It would not be right to look at the displacements experienced during forced migration from this perspective. Many people enter other countries illegally in order to ensure the safety of life and property. Some articles of the declaration have been prepared to include discrimination that may occur after migration. According to the provisions of article 2 of the declaration; *“1. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.2. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”* Article 15 states, *“1. Everyone has the right to a nationality. 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.”* In line with the provision, it was tried to prevent people from becoming homeless. In this case, it is against the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights for people who left their country of origin to lose their citizenship without any reason given by their country.

While the United Nations works to protect the rights of people who are subjected to persecution and oppression, it has also worked to protect the interests of the countries receiving immigration. The Declaration on State Asylum, adopted on 14 December 1967, was prepared in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Article 1 of the declaration, the evaluation of the applications of those who want to exercise their right of asylum and the final conclusion are left to the country of asylum. In Article 2, it is mentioned that other states will show solidarity in a way to alleviate the pressure on the asylum-granting country, either individually or by joining together of more than one country, in times when the asylum-granting countries are insufficient or face difficulties. It would not be wrong to base the Readmission Agreement signed by Turkey and the European Union on this article. Freedom of movement is defined as a human right in the European Convention on Human Rights. This right means being able to travel to their own country or to any other country. The convention also prohibits states from deporting their own citizens. It is

mentioned that no one can be deported individually or collectively from the country of which he is a citizen, and that his entry to the country of which he is a citizen cannot be prevented (art. 3). Also, the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits the collective deportation of foreigners (art.3). No reason or number is specified in the contract regarding this prohibition.

The Republic of Turkey has become a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Although the country did not apply the date restriction imposed by the Geneva Convention, it applied geographical restriction to the recognition in this convention. In 1994, in the Asylum and Asylum Regulation issued within the country, the definition of refugee was recognized as *“For the purposes of this Convention, the term “refugee” shall mean every person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is*

*unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*” in Article 3. According to this regulation, refugee status is not granted to people who have come to the Republic of Turkey from outside European countries and who have sought asylum.

Although refugee status in Turkey is only given to people coming from European countries, different legal statuses are given to people who immigrated to the country. According to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, two different statuses have been determined apart from being a refugee. These are the “conditional refugee” in Article 62 of the aforementioned law and the “subsidiary protection” in Article 63. On the basis of conditional refugee status, it is stated in the axis of the refugee definition of the 1951 Geneva Convention. As we mentioned, when the geographical restriction was imposed on the refugee status in the Turkish legislation, conditional refugee status emerged as a status that the citizens of countries other than European countries came to Turkey and gained due to the fear and pressure. In accordance with the article in the aforementioned law, conditional refugee status is granted to stateless persons. Person or persons with conditional refugee status can stay in Turkey

until they settle in a third country. Subsidiary Protection is for “*A foreigner or a stateless person, who neither could be qualified as a refugee nor as a conditional refugee, shall nevertheless be granted subsidiary protection upon the status determination because if returned to the country of origin or country of [former] habitual residence would; a) be sentenced to death or face the execution of the death penalty, b) face torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, c) face serious threat to himself or herself by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or nationwide armed conflict; and therefore is unable or for the reason of such threat is unwilling, to avail himself or herself of the protection of his country of origin or country of [former] habitual residence.*”

Syrian immigrants, who have migrated to Turkey massively since 2011 and are also included in this study, are excluded from these three statuses. The Republic of Turkey has issued a Temporary Protection Regulation for the immigrants who do not have the international protection status defined in the Turkish legislation and has granted the temporary protection status to the Syrian refugees who migrated to the country. In accordance with the regulation, its status is

*“Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection. (art.7)”* In this regulation issued in 2014, the education rights of Syrian refugees were also regulated. The procedures and conditions of the education to be received by the students, who are the focus group of our study, have been transferred to the Council of Higher Education with the 28th article. The duration and subject of the education received by these foreigners who received education in Turkey will be given to the people with the necessary documents, and the trainings received from different institutions will be documented after the examination of the necessary institutions and their equivalence will be ensured.

The Republic of Turkey also provided opportunities for these immigrants who came to their country to continue their education without interruption. Necessary arrangements for students who come to our country as immigrants and start/complete higher education here are regulated by the Higher Education Institution (HEI) as per the legislation. Residence permits are provided

only for students who prefer the Republic of Turkey for educational purposes and come to the country by obtaining a visa.

Immigrants actively use the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes to reach the European Union countries. Between 2008 and 2018, approximately 1.5 million illegal immigrants crossed to Europe using the Eastern Mediterranean route.<sup>1</sup> Especially, immigrants who want to cross to Europe via North African countries frequently use the Eastern Mediterranean route. After the Arab Spring process, immigrants from the Middle East countries who wanted to go to Europe saw Turkey as a “transit” country, but as a result of the policies implemented by Europe, Turkey became a target country from a transit country position.

Immigrants generally prefer countries with higher welfare levels – quite rationally. In this direction, a migration route is formed in the world from south to north and from east to west.<sup>2</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> Yener Şişman ve Bora Balun, “Transit Göç ve Türkiye”, *Anadolu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt:21, Sayı:2, Eskişehir 2020, s.66-67, ss.61-79.

<sup>2</sup> Umut Kedikli, “Bir Güvenlik Sorunu Olarak Düzensiz Göçe Bağlı Göçmen Kaçakçılığı”, *Uluslararası Göç ve*

location of Turkey, on the other hand, has the characteristics of a transit country on this route.

According to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM); in 2020, 50,161 immigrants from Afghanistan, 3,836 immigrants from Iraq and 17,562 immigrants from Syria were caught by law enforcement during their irregular migration journey.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the immigrants we interviewed are students from Syria and Afghanistan. Again, in line with the DGMM data, the provinces where the most irregular migrants are caught in Turkey are; these are the provinces of Istanbul, Edirne, Çanakkale, and İzmir, Aydın, Muğla, Erzurum, Ağrı and Van.<sup>4</sup> When we look at these provinces, there are two important points that draw attention; first, this is a route to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. Secondly, Erzurum, Ağrı and Van provinces are

---

*Güvenlik* (ed. Umut Kedikli, Gökhan Telatar), Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, Ankara 2019, s.96, ss.85-109

<sup>3</sup> GİGM, “Yıllara Göre Yakalanan Düzensiz Göçmenlerin Uyrak Dağılımı”, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-istatistikler>, E.T. 16.01.2021.

<sup>4</sup> GİGM, “2019 Yıl Sonu İtibariyle İllere Göre Yakalanan Düzensiz Göçmenler”, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-istatistikler>, E.T. 16.01.2021.

migration gates opening from east to west, especially for immigrants from Afghanistan.

Turkey's connection with the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe and its proximity to underdeveloped countries in many respects have made Turkey an important point on the migration route. Especially after the “Arab Spring”, the fact that the Middle East countries, especially the North African countries, faced internal instability, increased the importance of Turkey as a location and made it a target country rather than a transit country to Europe. Not only the civil wars in neighbouring countries are shown as the reason for Turkey's becoming a target country. Turkey's religious and cultural ties, especially with Middle Eastern countries, have also made Turkey a target country for societies living in neighbouring countries.<sup>5</sup>

The European Union provides financial support to transit countries experiencing irregular migration, especially Turkey and North African countries. The main purpose of this support is to

---

<sup>5</sup> Fahrettin Tepealtı, “Avrupa Birliğine Yönelik Türkiye Geçişli (Transit) Göç Hareketleri ve Türkiye'nin Düzensiz Göçle Mücadelesi”, *Doğu Coğrafya Dergisi*, Cilt:24, Sayı:41, 2019, s.129, ss.125.140.

prevent irregular migration towards the EU borders. First of all, there is a security concern before this policy implemented by the EU. Then there are the experiences he had with immigrants in the past. The failure of the integration process of the immigrants in the EU countries, their lack of qualifications at the employment points desired by the EU and the increase in judicial cases caused the EU to implement the “Fortress Europe policy” in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> The Republic of Turkey is one of the countries most affected by this migration wave. According to the data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 3.6 million Syrian refugees and 370.000 immigrants of different nationalities living in Turkey. In line with these data, the Republic of Turkey is the country that hosts the highest number of refugees/immigrants. This being the case, the Republic of Turkey has made new regulations in order to protect the rights granted to immigrants. According to the data of the Directorate General of

---

<sup>6</sup> Shal Őemsit ve Didem Őahal Őelik, “Kale Avrupası Yaklařımı ve Dzensiz Gç”, *Paradoks Ekonomi Sosyoloji ve Politika Dergisi*, Cilt:15, Sayı:2, Bursa 2019, s.286, ss.279-294.

Migration Management<sup>7</sup> of the Republic of Turkey, 1,246,937 of the total of 3,641,503 Syrian refugees who took refuge in the Republic of Turkey are people between the ages of 5-24 in education age. According to the data of the Higher Education Information Management System of the Republic of Turkey, while there were 48,183 Syrian university students between 2013 and 2014, this number increased to 185,047 between 2019-2020.

As of 23.12.2020; 3599 Iraqi immigrants, 48,914 Afghan immigrants and 17,203 Syrian immigrants were caught during irregular migration.

Included in the study; It will be useful to examine the situation in the countries of Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Yemeni students before they immigrate to Turkey, especially for political reasons, in order to understand the starting points of the stories.

---

<sup>7</sup> Makalede kullanılan sayısal veriler Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü ve diğer resmi kurumların yayınlarından derlenmiştir.

## **Migrant Routes**

### *Syria*

The Arab Spring demonstrations that started in Syria quickly turned into a civil war. In the unstable environment that took place in the country after the conflicts between the opposition groups and the regime, terrorist organizations such as ISIS and PKK also established violence and repression in certain regions of the country. The civilian population has been the most affected by this state of the country. Since the war began in 2011, life in the country has come to a complete standstill, and the people have become unable to even benefit from basic services such as education and health. Although the exact number of human casualties in the war is not known, thousands of people lost their lives and millions of Syrians had to leave their country. The demonstrations, first started by a group of university students in Deraa, increased day by day in the face of the harsh reaction of the government and spread throughout the country. Continuing the resistance by arming the anti-regime groups continued with the displacement of people first within the country and then their dispersal to various countries of the world, especially to the border neighbours. The

border neighbours of Syria were most affected by this migration wave.

Syrian refugees who set out to find a safe country of refuge; they migrated to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and other countries. Turkey, which has a border of 911 kilometers with Syria, has been preferred more because it is one of the most reliable places. Some of the Syrians who immigrated to Turkey were placed in camps, container and tent cities established at the borders, many people, especially in Istanbul; they were distributed to cities such as Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa and Batman.

According to the data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, four of the five countries with the highest concentration of Syrian refugees, with a total of 5,586,611 in the world, have direct land borders; Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The 5th country hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees is Egypt. Of the thirty university students included in this study, 19 are Syrian immigrant students.

The most important factor for Syrian refugees to prefer Turkey to migrate is that the country is a transfer point on the transit route from the Middle East to Europe. Although some of these

immigrants who came to Turkey dream of crossing to Europe by illegal sea or land, the contracts and agreements between Turkey and the European Union have prevented this. Another important reason is that it is easier to enter Turkey from Syria compared to other countries.

According to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management of the Republic of Turkey, 1,246,937 of the total of 3,641,503 Syrian refugees who took refuge in the Republic of Turkey are people between the ages of 5-24 in education age. According to the data of the Higher Education Information Management System of the Republic of Turkey, while there were 48,183 Syrian university students between 2013 and 2014, this number increased to 185,047 between 2019-2020.

### *Afghanistan*

The phenomenon of migration in Afghanistan is directly related to the political instability and power struggles that have existed since the establishment of the country. Afghanistan is one of the most ethnically diverse countries. Likewise, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Turks and Hazalaras in

Afghanistan have the population that can create political power on their own<sup>8</sup>. 99.7% of the country's population is Muslim. The sectarian distribution of Muslims is 84.7-89.7% Sunni and 10-15% Shiite. There was no unifying factor for the Afghan people other than the religion of Islam. Although religion enabled ethnic groups that had conflicts to coexist, oppression and violence came to the fore in time, and a strong national unity did not form in Afghanistan<sup>9</sup>.

The first wave of immigration in the country started as a result of the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet army on 24 December 1979. This occupation lasted until 1989 and not only created a mass migration wave, but also caused the death of approximately 870 thousand people in 240 days.<sup>10</sup> This process, which lasted until February 15, 1989, caused the migration of approximately one fifth of the population, that is, more than 5

---

<sup>8</sup> Özgür Çınarlı, “Afganistan’ın Etnik Yapısı”, *Aksaray Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, (2012): 74.

<sup>9</sup> CIA “Afghanistan Factbook”, 13 Aralık 2020 tarihinde erişildi, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/AF-summary.pdf>,

<sup>10</sup> Selda Geyik Yıldırım, “Göç ve Afganlar ‘İstikrarlı Mülteciler’”, *Göç Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (2018):136

million people. 2 million people displaced within the country.<sup>11</sup>

Afghanistan experienced an economic and political crisis with the Soviet occupation of the country, and conflicts began between groups that wanted to take advantage of the emerging power vacuum. The beginning of the conflicts caused a second wave of migration in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban came to power in the country by taking advantage of the authority vacuum after a bloody civil war, it has been listed as a terrorist organization by many states today. The Taliban took almost the whole of the country under its control in 1996, with the adoption of a form of government based on a radical interpretation of Islam, and this triggered migration. The refugee influx started from Kabul and Kandahar, which was captured by the Taliban between 1994-2000 and continued throughout the country. In 2001, war broke out between the coalition forces led by the United States and the Taliban, and for this reason, the third wave of global migration came to

---

<sup>11</sup> Oxfam, “The Cost of War”, 13 Aralık 2020 tarihinde erişildi, [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/afghanistan-the-cost-of-war\\_14.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/afghanistan-the-cost-of-war_14.pdf)

the fore, and mass displacements showed themselves once again.

Migration movements of Afghans towards Iran and Pakistan have increased throughout the history of the country and these countries have become the geography where Afghans live the most. In addition, factors such as geographical proximity and cultural ties have had an impact on the migration to Iran and Pakistan. Although many Afghans in Iran and Pakistan returned to their countries after the Russian War, they had to flee again with the onset of new conflicts. However, the period of welcoming Afghan refugees with optimism in Iran has begun to change. Along with Iran, there have been changes in the aid provided by Pakistan to refugees. This situation paved the way for Afghans to migrate to Turkey via Iran. Turkey, which is at the crossroads between countries that send and receive immigration from Afghanistan, where there have been massive waves of migration historically, has become a point of attraction for the Afghan people. Afghan immigrants, who set out from Iran to reach Turkey or European countries, often entered Turkey via Iğdır, Ağrı, and Van.

According to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management, when the number of immigrants holding a residence permit in Turkey as of 2020 is examined, those with Afghanistan nationality are in the seventh place with 42,200 people. As of 2020, Afghans residing in Turkey with a student residence permit were again in the seventh place with 4079 people. In the number of irregular migrants apprehended, Afghans ranked first with 201.437 people, according to the 2019 data of the Directorate General of Migration Management.<sup>12</sup> While the number of Afghan students in Turkey was 2020 between 2013 and 2014 according to the data of the Higher Education Information Management System of the Republic of Turkey, this number increased to 6089 between the years 2019-2020.<sup>13</sup>

There are eight Afghan students whose stories we have included in our study. The common feature of all eight people is that they were affected

---

<sup>12</sup> Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, “İstatistikler”, 14 Aralık 2020 tarihinde erişildi, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-istatistikler>

<sup>13</sup> Yükseköğretim Bilgi Sistemi “Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu”, 14 Aralık 2020 tarihinde erişildi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

by the turmoil and oppressive attitudes created by terrorism. They were not free, as they stated, and could not live comfortably. The brother of one of them was kidnapped, one was caught in a bomb attack in front of his school, and one was to be forced into marriage when he was 13 years old. They wanted to roam the streets, feel happy and read, but the internal turmoil in the country forced them to emigrate like the others.

### *Iraq*

Chaos and insecurity among people are among the most important reasons for migration in the Middle East. The chaotic environment in Iraq, which is included in our study, caused an intense migration movement and this situation was also reflected in Turkey. The migration mobility in Iraq started in 1990. The Gulf War, which started with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, brought about many problems. After the war, those living in the south and north of Iraq revolted against the Iraqi regime, but were suppressed by the Baathist forces of Saddam Hussein. For this reason, those living in northern Iraq gathered on the border of Turkey and Iran to escape the intervention of Saddam Hussein. The uncertainty stemming from

the lack of authority in Northern Iraq after the Gulf War also triggered migration.

The second wave of migration in Iraq started in 2003. The Second Gulf War started on March 20, 2003, following the United States' claim that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction. As a result of the war, Saddam Hussein's administration was ended in May 2003, and with the temporary elections held on 30 January 2005, a democratic administration system was introduced in Iraq. However, this development could not prevent the chaotic environment that emerged after the occupation. Migration that started in 2003 in the country gained momentum in 2006. Founded in the first years of the Iraq War and recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union and Turkey, ISIS has increased its activities in Northern Iraq. Many people had to leave their homes due to ISIS kidnapping civilians and threatening them with death. For this reason, acts of violence took the first place among the issues that push people to migrate. At the same time, events that violate human rights, such as threats to life and property, oppression, murder, torture, extrajudicial execution, and kidnapping, have caused people to migrate. Turkey, which was an escape place for

Syrians, has also turned into a shelter for Iraqis, as ISIS began to take over new lands in Iraq as well as Syria. Iraqis who wanted to escape the persecution in the country tried to reach Turkey through the border roads.

Two Iraqi students whose stories we shared were also affected by the atmosphere of insecurity in their own country. Moreover, Wassak's brother and sister were kidnapped and tortured in front of his family. Another Iraqi student, Kayser, who is also included in our book, had to move twice within the country due to the attacks of ISIS. Wassak and Kayser are just two of the people who have undergone forced migration. Thousands of people like them set out for a better living condition.

According to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management, as of 2020, the number of Iraqis in our country with a residence permit is 114,625. According to the data of the Higher Education Information Management System of the Republic of Turkey, while there were 1196 Iraqi students between 2013 and 2014,

this number increased to 6769 between 2019-2020.

14

### ***Yemen***

One of the countries with security problems and included in our study is Yemen. The biggest reason for the turmoil in Yemen is the civil war that broke out in 2015. The rebel group, named Ansarullah (Houthi), named after its founder, Hüseyin Bedreddin al-Houthi, launched an armed uprising in Yemen for the first time in 2004. Their aim is to gain more autonomy and preserve the Zayyid traditions in Saada, which they consider to be their center.<sup>15</sup> The uprisings that started in 2004 turned into a civil war and in 2015, the Houthis captured the capital Sana'a. Then the Houthis tried to take control of the whole country, and this affected the civilians in the country. Thousands of civilians were injured and lost their lives due to the war in the country, and they were on the verge of death due to starvation.

---

<sup>14</sup> Yükseköğretim Bilgi Sistemi, a.g.e.

<sup>15</sup> Trthaber, "Husiler Kimdir? Yemen Krizi Neden Çıktı?", 15 Aralık 2020'de erişildi, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/husiler-kimdir-yemen-krizi-neden-cikti-175253.html>

In response to the actions of the Houthis in cooperation with the General People's Congress Party (GPC), the Arab Coalition, which includes more than 10 countries, was established. The coalition was established under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, after the separation of Qatar (2017) and Morocco (2019), the states that took part in the coalition; United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania. Although the coalition started operations to stop the progress of the Houthis in Yemen and to break their power, it could not achieve a decisive victory and caused the geography of the war to expand.

The country has entered into a crisis with the civil war it has been through. Protests started to increase in Yemen, which could not calm the confusion within itself. Especially in January 2011, demonstrations started under the name of bread and freedom against the administration of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Yemen started to get poorer due to the effects of the civil war and the humanitarian crisis in the country became clear. According to the 2019 report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it is stated that eight children are killed or injured every day in 31 regions where the war is still ongoing. Not only war, but also poverty and health problems in the

country cause deaths. Yemen is in the midst of a protracted political, humanitarian and development crisis. According to United Nations data; since 2015, with 24.1 million people, 80 percent of the population is in need of humanitarian aid and protection. Since the same date, more than 14 million people have urgent needs and more than three million people have been displaced. In addition, 58% of the population lives in extreme poverty.<sup>16</sup>

After the civil war and crisis that started in the country, people who remained in poverty began to migrate to raise their living standards. The common point of the two Yemeni students in our study is that they do not want their education to be interrupted due to the crisis in the country. That's why they both chose Turkey to get a better education. As of 2020, the number of Yemenis in Turkey with a student residence permit is 2,692. According to Higher Education Information Management System data, 279 Yemeni students

---

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, “The United Nations in Yemen”, 15 Aralık 2020’de erişildi, <https://yemen.un.org/en/about/about-the-un>

were found in Turkey between 2013-2014. This number increased to 3637 between 2019-2020. <sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Yükseköğretim Bilgi Sistemi “Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu”, 14 Aralık 2020 tarihinde erişildi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

## **SAARA**

Saara was born in Afghanistan in 2000. She was the daughter of a wealthy family with no financial problems. She was a kid with hobbies and talents. She likes to draw, she took painting courses from an early age. She wanted to be a tattoo artist in the future. She was also very successful in school. But when she was 13, she found herself in unexpected events. The civil war in Afghanistan has intensified. As time passed, Saara and her family felt the hardships of the war more and more, but there was another difficulty they faced: a moral issue that had been on their minds for a long time, which instilled fear in them. They had some enemies and they wanted to kill them.

One morning they came face to face with their fears: they killed her father because of the custom case. Nothing would ever be the same again. Her father's killers were threatening to kill Saara and her mother as well. But they had given them a condition; they were going to marry 13-year-old Saara to their own son. If Saara became their bride, they would leave her family alone.

Child marriage is considered very normal in Afghanistan. Girls' dreams, such as studying or

working, are not respected, and they are never asked what they want. Saara and her family did not consent to this request, but their lives were also in danger. They went to the security forces and explained the situation, but it was not easy to resist the custom case.

The poor mother who had lost her husband could not afford to lose her daughter as well. The only solution was to leave these lands. So they did. Saara, her mother, brother and uncle decided to escape. The first stop was India. But their enemies followed suit, as Saara and her family tried to cover their tracks. They established a temporary order in India, but this lasted only five months. When she was about to be caught, her uncle noticed and they were able to escape again. This time they tried their luck in Tajikistan, but the Tajikistan administration did not want them. They had to hold on. Let alone getting an education, working to earn money was not even allowed in Tajikistan. They have been subjected to violence many times. Everyone in the family was employed illegally, without a formal work permit, because they needed to earn money.

Saara also got a job as a waitress in a restaurant, but the customers who came there

wouldn't even order Saara just because she was a woman. She was helpless, her hopes dwindling with each passing day. On the one hand, the feeders who did not let go, on the other hand, did not know what to do in the face of the cruel treatment they received from people. The last resort was to complain to the police, whereas in the police administration they were clearly told that they could not solve anything without bribing.

They wanted to try their luck one more time. This time they were going to Turkey. Saara's aunt lived in Turkey. But how would they go? They had neither the money nor the power to afford it. They packed some stuff in a backpack and went to Iran with their last money. From there they marched towards the border for three days and three nights to reach Turkey. It was a journey full of fear and anxiety; they were suffocating with hunger, thirst and exhaustion. But moving on meant moving on with life for them. All they wanted was to get to a safe place. Finally, they were able to reach the border at the end of a rather troublesome journey. They got on a bus and arrived in Turkey after a 24-hour journey. They first came to Istanbul, where they met with the governor's office with the help of their aunt and obtained a permit. Afterwards, they decided to settle in Karabuk, one of the cities

presented to them. When they came to Karabuk, they were still uneasy; some hope, some fear, questions with unknown answers, on the other hand, the determination to hold on to life... They thought that they would be excluded here, too, after all they had experienced. However, this was a different place; their depleted hopes rose again, their confidence was renewed. They found peace in this city, they created an order for themselves. Saara and her family easily found work in Karabuk. Saara started working in a hairdresser's, made new friends after being ostracized before, learned to speak Turkish. The peace and joy of being free was something else; now she could wear the clothes she wanted, go out whenever she wanted.

In addition to all the difficulties she experienced, Saara also had gains: she had learned Hindi, Tajik, English and Russian during the grueling migration. He also knew Turkish now. Thanks to these languages, he was also the translator of foreign nationals who came to the hairdresser where he worked. At the same time, she started painting courses that she loved very much and acquired different hobbies.

After living in Turkey for a year, she decided to study. Desiring to become a teacher, she enrolled in the English Language and Literature department. She started her preparatory education at the Turkish Teaching Center. She was very satisfied with the education she received. Her teachers treated her very well and were understanding. She adapted to the new life and the new order in a short time. The prejudices, fears and worries that occupied her mind in the past disappeared over time.

Despite everything, Saara says she will not forget what she went through and will tell everyone the story of her youthful experience, which will teach everyone a life lesson. Of course, she also needs to tell in order not to bow down in the face of evil, tyranny and injustice and to survive as a strong woman. Saara now has only one wish: to complete her education and get her diploma as soon as possible, to become a teacher, and to spread the knowledge, tolerance and helpfulness she gained from her teachers among young people.

## ASAF

Asaf<sup>18</sup> was only 17 years old when he met the bloody face of war. His youth, perhaps the best times of his life, were swept away by the war. While his peers are going to school, playing games in the neighborhood; Asaf had to leave his school and neighborhood behind. Those beautiful days when he lived happily and peacefully with his family in Ayn al-Arab, Syria, without any financial difficulties or even the slightest problem that may come to mind, are now over. His father had a small business. From time to time, he and his brothers helped their fathers and worked at work. Asaf was not actually working out of necessity. His aim was only to help his father, to make sure that he did not get too tired.

Everything was fine until 2014, but one night, their lives were turned upside down by the sudden arrival of soldiers. Asaf and his family had to leave their once peaceful home, taking some essential items with them. Asaf remembers that inauspicious night as follows: *“We opened our eyes towards the morning, people in the village had come to the center. It was as if the world had*

---

<sup>18</sup>Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Asaf” was used in the story.

*turned upside down. Everyone was gathering and getting ready. We just took our clothes and ran away. We came to the border in haste.”*

Asaf and his family were not the only ones who escaped. Most of the people in the city they live in have embarked on a journey where they are not sure what they will encounter. Everyone had one goal: to save their family and loved ones...

Asaf and his family came to the border. They thought that the events would be over in two or three weeks at the most and the war would be over. However, the situation was very different, the civil war was getting more and more fierce. Asaf and his family did not have the opportunity to choose a country, the only thing they could do was take refuge in Turkey. For them, this was the only country that could sustain their good or bad lives. Thus, they started an immigration life that they never expected.

A few weeks after Asaf's father and uncle came to Turkey, they could not stand the homesickness. His father wanted to return to Ayn al-Arab, repair their war-torn house and live there again with his family. The two brothers set out, but that night shots began to rise from the border; ISIS had raided the city. Asaf was very worried about

his father, his world collapsed on him. He wanted to follow his father, but his mother prevented him. People gathered at the border with the Syrian youth, but no one dared to go where the sounds of shooting were heard.

There was a great tragedy. Nearly five hundred people lost their lives in the ISIS attack. Asaf's father was alive, but there was no news of his uncle. His father was looking for his brother in fear and anxiety. The words that came out of the mouth of someone who was calling him at that time and it was understood from his speech that he was an ISIS member, shattered his world: "*We killed your brother, it's your turn...*" Asaf's father was helpless before these words that consumed his hope.

The bad news did not cease. Asaf lost his cousin in an explosion in Damascus in 2012. What happened was very difficult for Asaf and his family. Returning to their country meant suicide for them. That's why they decided to stay in refugee camps in Turkey. After a while, they went to their relatives living in Şanlurfa. Under one roof, there were 20 people in total, including uncles, siblings, and parents. "*It was very difficult, we used to wait in line even to sleep*" Asaf says,

describing the place where he lived. While he used to have a comfortable life, a room of his own in his house, now he had a difficult life.

Asaf and his seven siblings had to leave school after immigration. They started working in Şanlıurfa to earn money and continue their lives. They worked in construction, next to an electrician, in a tile shop. They sweated to make money in factories and everywhere imaginable. At that time, Asaf's father decided to go to another country as they could not return to Syria and applied for a visa to Canada. His visa application was accepted and he immigrated to Canada after a difficult process. A few months later, he was able to take his mother and siblings with him. However, Asaf was not admitted to Canada because he turned 18. After all the hardships he went through, he had to continue his struggle for survival alone.

Asaf's only goal was to go to Canada after his family. So they set out with their seven friends. First they decided to go to Greece. They crossed the border with Greece and continued walking as darkness fell. They walked for exactly six hours. Everywhere they stepped in the forest was mud. Asaf and his friends managed to reach a city after a terrible, cold and frightening night. He was

happy and hoped that he would reach his family. He asked a passerby about the train station and continued to move forward, but suddenly the Greek police appeared in front of him. The person he asked about the train station had reported him. Although he tried to escape, he was caught and taken into custody. He was not allowed to say a single word and was taken into custody. He was sent to Turkey on the grounds of the readmission agreement signed between Turkey and the European Union in 2013. Unable to reunite with his family, Asaf had only one way to hold on to life again: to get an education. First of all, he had to improve his Turkish. He enrolled in the Turkish Teaching Center. After completing his language education, he took the exams and won the International Trade Department at Afyon Kocatepe University. At first he had difficulty with the language, but soon he was able to overcome this difficulty and got used to the place where he lived. While his family was with him, he was getting help from the Red Crescent, but when his family went to Canada, this aid was also cut off.

Asaf says that education in Turkey is of good quality. Counting the days to get his bachelor's degree. He wants to get his diploma as soon as possible, go to Canada and reunite with his family.

Losing loved ones, home and country at a young age; It hurts Asaf that he can't see the people he calls friends again. But despite everything, he says he finds peace in a place where there is no war and no bombs explode.

Asaf compares his experiences to a bad dream and expresses his surprise and sadness as follows: *“I could never have guessed that things would reach this point. We thought we'd stay here for a week or two, then things would settle down, everything would be fine and we'd be back. That one week turned into two weeks, two months, and two years. It still continues. It's been six years...”*

Asaf is reluctant to return to his country for now. But he still says, *“One day, I will return to my hometown, Syria.”* There are two things he dreams about now; graduating from the university and going to his family to meet them... That's why Asaf clings to his school and strives to give a new direction to his life both on behalf of his family and himself.

## MEHRAN

Originally of Uzbek origin, 26-year-old Mehran<sup>19</sup> was just one of the people who met the brutal face of terrorism at a young age. Everything he experienced and witnessed was too difficult to bear at his childhood.

He had a happy and peaceful life before. His sole purpose was to be educated. Mehran and his siblings worked in his father's shop so as not to be a burden to the family. Among his siblings, only his older brother worked outside; He was serving as a commander in a police station. It was a time of terror. Those who served in the army were the target of the organization. Threats and oppression were getting stronger with each passing day. Mehran's older brother ignored these threats and continued his duty by saying “*my duty is to serve the country*”. However, the terrorist organization was determined to play its dirty thoughts and therefore followed Mehran's older brother. One day, armed men stormed the shop that belonged to his family. The Afghan youth was also in the shop at that time. Someone was standing guard outside. The terrorist organization, who did not know who

---

<sup>19</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Mehrán” was used in the story.

to take, caught Mehran and dragged him outside. When the person who was on the watch said, “*This is not the person we’re going to take*” they released the young man. His brother came running just then. The person who was wanted to be kidnapped by the terrorist organization was already his brother and he was kidnapped in front of Mehran's eyes. The young man, who could not do anything, stood there wondering what to do and waited for hours. His family was deeply saddened. Eighteen days later the news came; Mehran's older brother was alive. This was the best news the family had ever received. The terrorist organization demanded a ransom of \$20,000. The family had to pay the ransom. They were lucky because many more young people were kidnapped and killed by terrorist organizations.

It was difficult for them to regain their senses after this terrible event they had experienced. Despite everything, Mehran was trying to leave everything behind and hold on to life. He graduated from high school, took the exam and won the Mining Engineering Department of Baglan University. But unfortunately, he could only stay in Baglan for three months. Because the violence of terrorism was felt more here. At first he even took the risk of staying with seven people

in a tiny room, but the situation was getting worse and worse. It was impossible to live in Baglan. The Afghan youth describes his experiences in Baglan, where he went to study:

*“I lived there for about 2 or 3 months and we were 7 people in a room. We had a lot of difficulties. The room we lived in had neither a toilet nor a bathroom. We couldn't even go out because of the pressure of the Taliban. After 21:00 we had to lock the door. Because the members of the Taliban were stealing by entering the rooms of people who came to the university to study. I personally witnessed such an event once. The terrorists raided the student room of the building just across from where we were staying and took everything from the phone to the charger. After this incident, we started to get more afraid, we couldn't go out, we decided to lock our door and stay at home.”*

Despite everything, the Afghan youth was determined to study. While continuing his school by enduring all kinds of difficulties, this time he witnessed the bomb explosions of the school where he was educated by the Taliban terrorist organization. He narrowly escaped death. The events did not stop. He witnessed bloody events

many times. It was impossible for him to continue his education in such an environment. That's why he decided to take the exams again and go abroad. After a strict schedule, he took the exams and was successful. He had many options, but he chose Turkey. He came to Ankara in 2013 and then to Konya. Here he took the exam again and won the Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering at Afyon Kocatepe University. Although he knew the difficulties of studying in another country, he did not even think of giving up; both studied and worked. At first, it was very difficult due to financial difficulties. He applied for the scholarship and was accepted. This gave him some relief. However, his scholarship was terminated due to an event that he did not understand. Even though he tried to get his scholarship back, he couldn't get any results and he had to make do with the money he earned by working. Despite these difficulties, Mehran completed his four-year university education and graduated.

Mehran, of course, did not reach these places easily. In the face of the difficulties they experienced, they never took a step back, did not succumb to terrorism; His determination, perseverance and determination brought him to

both humanity and his country. Mehran states that he chose Turkey voluntarily, that he is satisfied with his life here and the people around him, and that he wants to stay in Afyon and pursue a master's degree. Emphasizing the importance of reading and being cultured in every sentence, he says, *“When I meet my fellow countrymen, I check whether they are educated people or not.”* He says: *“I believe that there is a difference between a person who has read and a person who has not read. People who have not read are not spoken to because they tend to use brute force. But it is always possible to sit down and talk to an educated person. No harm can come from such a person.”*

No matter how much he wants to return to his country, he thinks that it will be very difficult due to terrorism and that he will not find the happy and peaceful life he has in Turkey in Afghanistan. Currently working in the private sector, Mehran likes to travel to different parts of Turkey with his friends in his spare time. He went to many cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Hatay, Şanlıurfa and Burdur; He says that wherever he is, he encounters beautiful people and colorful cultures. Mehran's current goal is to stay in Afyon and pursue a master's degree. He has already started working on this...

## **MARIA**

Maria was born in Syria in 2000. Her father was working in a construction company. But the terrorist organizations in Syria did not allow her to work, they were attacking, extortion and violence when she least expected it. She was not taken seriously and ridiculed by the relevant authorities she applied to defend her rights. When Maria's father realized that it was impossible to deal with this situation, she had to go to Saudi Arabia to work. Maria, on the other hand, remained in Syria with her sister and mother. Maria, who was studying in high school at that time, was continuing her education while struggling to survive in the war environment. The fact that three women lived without a man in Syria, a country where gender equality is not accepted, was very disturbing to the terrorist organization ISIS. The organization even blocked Maria's mother one day, harassed and threatened her. It was no longer possible to live under these conditions. As a family, they decided to settle down with their father in Saudi Arabia.

A new life began for Maria and her family. In fact, the situation in Saudi Arabia was not much different. There were different rules, too. People's

perspectives on each other were different; when it comes to a family from Syria, this point of view reached a different dimension. Maria and her family were ostracized and mistreated by those around them. In Saudi Arabia, women could not go out alone, and Maria and her sister could not go out without their father.

Maria was going to study her senior year of high school in Saudi Arabia. That year, they enrolled in the same school as her sister. The two sisters had very beautiful dreams of getting an education and having a job they love. In Saudi Arabia, women cannot work, move freely or vote. In short, they were utterly worthless in the eyes of society. Her mother and father did not want their daughters to live in such an environment, they worked for them to study and develop themselves and have a profession.

Maria was shocked when she started school in Saudi Arabia, there were only girls in her class. Girls and boys were educated in different classes and were forbidden to make friends. They went to school in a long black sheet that covered all parts of the body. Boys and girls had separate entrance gates to the school. All of the teachers teaching were male. Girls were forbidden to open their face

veils in school. Saddened by this situation, Maria describes an event she can never forget:

*“One day I was branded dishonest because of the socks I wore on my feet; my outfit had to be all black. I also wore white socks that day, the black sheet on me was covering everything. My white sock, whose very small part was visible, disturbed our school administrator and promptly disciplined me. The principal said to me, 'You came here to study, if you're going to be dishonest, go somewhere else'. I only heard these words because my socks were white, I couldn't do anything; I went home and changed my socks. I had to, because I had to finish school.”*

Maria completed her high school education by facing many difficulties and obstacles just because she was a woman. She decided to take her university education abroad. Her family also supported this decision. Now she wanted to live and study freely without being pressured. As a result of her research, she decided to go to Turkey, which she liked both for her education and culturally close to. In 2017, she left her family behind and embarked on this difficult journey. Maria first researched the schools she wanted to study at. Finally, she decided to study at Karabuk

University, Department of Civil Engineering. It was very difficult at first. Since she did not know Turkish, she was only trying to communicate in English and Arabic. She was able to learn Turkish, albeit a little, thanks to the TV series and movies she watched. Maria's adjustment period did not take long and she soon made friends. Both the intense communication with her Turkish friends and the education she received at the Turkish Teaching Center helped Maria overcome her language problem. She had full confidence in herself now; she continued on her way without hesitation. She was not considered strange and deprived of her rights because she was a woman. Clinging to her father's profession, civil engineering, she only took care of her lessons, and worked day and night to become a good female engineer.

Maria was very upset about her sister's experience, worried for her and very much wanted to realize her dreams together. This year, one of her dreams has come true. Her sister also completed her high school education and came to Karabuk, next to Maria for her university education. Now the two brothers go to school together, go out whenever they want, and are not humiliated or ostracized because they are women.

Their teachers and friends always help them. Maria says: *“I cannot describe the joy of going out and drinking coffee with my brother... We do not know where life will take us, but there is no question of returning to Syria or Saudi Arabia while enjoying this freedom. I and my brother won't be going back, I hope our family will join us now.”*

The difficulties in Maria's life are now over. She just misses her family. She is trying to satisfy this longing by video chatting on the internet, she. She wants her brother to get higher education like herself. It is Maria's ideal of life to make their families proud as two successful women in their profession, and to achieve that strong woman profile that her mother always dreamed of.

## **ALI**

The Arab Spring began to show its effect in Syria in 2011 as well. A large part of the Syrian people took to the streets to protest Bashar Assad. The government used brute force to suppress the protests, security forces and soldiers were shooting at random, killing people. Those who survived were questioned by the security forces and tortured until they confessed who they had joined the protest with. During the torture, videos were taken and used to threaten other people... Among those who joined the protests was a university student named Ali<sup>20</sup>, who was born in Raqqa. He participated in many marches to protest the Assad government and somehow managed to escape from the soldiers.

When Ali came to Homs due to his university education and settled here, the people of the city were divided into two as Alawite and Sunni. The house that Ali rented was in the neighborhood where the Alevi lived heavily. One day, the house he stayed in was raided by the regime forces, and it was questioned why he lived in that area even though he was not an Alevi, and Ali was treated

---

<sup>20</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Ali” was used in the story.

like a terrorist. They thought he was a member of ISIS. That's why he was arrested and put in a prison where political criminals are kept. Every day, he is questioned by the soldiers, "What kind of action does ISIS want to take", "Where and when will they take action?", "Who else is in the organization other than you?", and "Who is helping you?" He was subjected to various tortures by asking such questions. It continued like this for a month, then it was transferred to Damascus. The situation in prisons in Damascus was worse. Because the detainees were first interrogated in the branches, and the people they could not get concrete information about were transferred to the central prison. Many of those who fell into these prisons were executed. Ali was also interrogated enough in Homs. The interrogation might have taken a long time, but thanks to the efforts of his father, who was a lawyer, and by paying some money, the interrogation was prevented. Ali was terrified when he heard that he would end up in the prison in Damascus. Likewise, they had friends who were sentenced there and no news could be heard from them, everyone thought that they were executed. Ali was very worried about this situation. The things he feared did not come true and he was transferred to the prison known as the

Civil Prison in Damascus. The death rate in this prison was lower than in the others. They put Ali in a cell. The cell was a room about 20 square meters wide. There were a hundred other people in the room with him. It was an extremely stuffy and damp place, there were no beds and everyone was lying on the floor. The space was so narrow that the prisoners also slept alternately at intervals lasting four hours. Ali tried to get used to this situation. After all, he was trying to console himself somehow, thinking that he wouldn't die. After three months in prison in Damascus, he was released as a result of his father's efforts.

Ali thought that he would return to his old life when he was released from prison, and wanted to continue his school and graduate. But it was very difficult for someone who was released from prison to regain their old order. Likewise, wherever he went, he was asked for his identity by the security forces and he was causing problems because he had been in jail before. This situation made Ali very sad and upset his psychology. He didn't want to go to jail again, so he wouldn't even go out on the street. When he realized that he could not live like this, he decided to flee the country. He had in mind to settle in one of the European countries, but it was very difficult to reach there.

The only alternative was the neighboring state of Turkey.

Ali left his school in the autumn of 2015 and left for Idlib. His aim was to reach the Turkish border from Idlib. But when he arrived in Idlib, he realized that it would not be easy to reach the border because there were very tight security measures and the regime forces were not letting anyone in. Bombs were exploding all over the city. Shortly after, his father also came to Idlib. They kept a house there and waited for the atmosphere to settle down. They tried every way to reach the border, but they could not overcome the obstacles of the Assad regime and Russian forces. After staying in Idlib for about ten months, they crossed the border with the identity of another person who came from Turkey for a holiday visit. They crossed the border and reached Mersin, where they started to live by renting a house. Adapting to the environment was not easy. Ali had a lot of trouble with language, he had difficulty communicating with people because he did not speak Turkish. That's why he first enrolled in the Turkish Teaching Center, and he solved the language problem to a great extent by following his lessons carefully.

Ali's biggest desire is to make a movie. For this, he wants to complete the department he studied in Turkey. However, he cannot be successful in his classes because he does not have enough knowledge of Turkish. Of course, having to work to earn a living and not being able to spare enough time for school are among the main reasons for this failure. He does not receive any scholarship from any institution or organization. The only way to make a living is to live close to the border gates and earn money by guiding the immigrants.

Ali does not want to return to Syria again. What he wants most is to become a Turkish citizen, complete his education and make a movie about the situation in his country.

## **BEHRAM ARIF**

Behram Arif <sup>21</sup>was born in Syria in 1997. He lived in Aleppo before the civil war broke out. He later had to emigrate. Because Behram Arif wanted to read, learn and improve himself. After the war started, there was neither a proper school nor an environment where he could defend his ideas. His country was full of blood and suffering.

He decided to take refuge in Turkey: because his mother was Turkish and lived in Turkey. In this way, he would be able to visit his mother and continue his education in this process. Behram Arif entered the country accompanying a patient who was transferred from Syria to Turkey. A patient who had an operation and whose treatment was to be continued in Turkey was alone with him, and this made it easier for him to enter the country. The patient he was accompanying returned to Syria after his treatment was completed, but Behram Arif remained in Turkey. First, he lived in the Islahiye district of Gaziantep for two years. He found a suitable job there. His condition was not

---

<sup>21</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Behram Arif” was used in the story.

bad, he even saved some money. Then he went to Istanbul and worked with his brother for two years.

Family members who came to Turkey when the war broke out in Syria returned when the situation in the war zone improved relatively. But Behram Arif decided to stay in Turkey with his older brother. Behram Arif's older brother found a job in Adana and settled there. When his older brother went to Adana, Behram Arif also came to Karabuk to get university education by ending his business life. Here he enrolled in the Department of English Language and Literature. Behram Arif describes the day he started university as the most meaningful moment of his life.

Of course, it is not easy for a person to study abroad; such an education has its own difficulties. The most important of these difficulties is the language problem. Behram Arif did not have much trouble in this regard, because before he started his education life, he was intertwined with people in various cities of Turkey for about four years. When he spoke in a foreign language, he sometimes got a reaction from the environment, but generally the people he was in contact with were trying to make him speak Turkish and were telling him the Turkish equivalent of what they wanted to say.

This situation enabled Behram Arif to have a fluent Turkish until he came to Karabuk. In this way, he did not have to enroll in the Turkish Teaching Center of his school, and the department he studied was not a Turkish department. Another problem was accommodation. Behram Arif says that he does not have much difficulty in this regard. He rented a house with the friends he made at the university, he loved Karabuk, when he traveled to other cities, he couldn't stay there long, he couldn't wait to go back; He says that even if the war ends in his country, he will not return and will continue to live in Karabuk.

Behram Arif used to devote his time to school without the need to work in any job in Karabuk at first. But later on, he had to work and earn money because he had no scholarship or other income. For this, he gave private Turkish lessons to foreign students. In this way, he was able to meet his living and expenses.

Behram Arif says that he is now adapting to Turkey and thinks that the similarity of customs and traditions in both countries is effective in the adaptation process. He says that in addition to being a student, he is also under temporary protection, but does not know much about his

rights. In fact, he says that he does not make an effort to learn about these rights, that he does not face a situation where this may be necessary, that he can seek help by applying to law enforcement if necessary, and that he can receive health care when needed.

In addition, in his speech, he emphasized the advantage of knowing the language and emphasized that many of his friends faced many problems just because of this, that is, because they did not know the language.

Behram Arif states that he is satisfied with the education he received at Karabuk University. He says that after the decision to switch to online education, there are problems in the distance education system of many universities, while there are no problems in Karabuk University both in the normal education period and in the summer school. The only issue that preoccupies him with education is whether his diploma will be considered valid in Syria. As far as he heard from his friends, he says that he can use the diploma he will receive from Turkey in his country.

Despite everything, Behram Arif wants to continue his education in Turkey and stay here to do his master's and doctorate. Stating that he does

not regret the decisions he has taken so far, he thinks that his life has come to this point as a result of his own choices. Despite the war and the pain he went through, he always thanks everyone for everything...

## OMAR

Born in 1994 in Aleppo, Omar lived with his family in Azez, on the Turkish border. In 2014, the life of Omar and his family changed completely in one day. That day everywhere was bombed, his brother was wounded in the leg and was rushed to the hospital. They had to amputate the boy's leg. The effects of the war, the sounds of bombs and the injury of his brother turned the psychology of the family upside down. After a while, Omar learned that the hospital where his brother was taken was in Turkey; He wanted to see his brother, to be with him, to get rid of the devastating effects of the war as soon as possible. They came to Turkey as a family; in his own words, they had to come. Only his uncles remained in Syria. Leaving his dreams, hopes and school behind, Omar got used to Turkey in a short time by facing hardships with his family. First they settled in Adana. Omar worked in a kebab shop for two years, but his salary was very low. He also states that he encounters strange questions from time to time at the place where he works: *“Is there a TV there? Is there internet, car there?”* That he was constantly faced with such questions, but before the war they had everything necessary for a person to maintain a normal life order. With the start of the war, there

was a devastation. Unfortunately, some people in Turkey interpreted Syria only in terms of the post-war situation. As time passed, Omar mastered his craft, learned how to cook kebab in Adana and started to earn more money. Then he went to Konya, then to Antep; He was found in 51 cities in total for six years. He mostly worked in restaurant-style businesses and with the money he earned, he met his needs such as cleaning and health.

The biggest problem he faced when he first came to Turkey was the language problem. When Omar came to Turkey in 2014, there weren't many Syrians in Turkey and he was treated well by the locals. Even though he spoke Arabic because he could not learn Turkish fully, he did not receive any negative reaction from his environment. Of course, from time to time; it was also the case that people who did not read and did not question were viewed differently and discriminated against. Omar, on the other hand, always argued that a 20-year-old can do wrong things, but it is not right to attribute individual mistakes to all people and to judge with a wholesale mentality.

He was able to adapt to society despite some negative situations he experienced in the first time. After working for a long time and earning money,

he decided to study in 2014. He won the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Karabuk University. First, he enrolled in the Turkish Teaching Center and the English course. In this way, he learned both languages at an advanced level. Omar is currently pursuing his undergraduate degree by receiving a scholarship from the Turkish government and receives financial support from another institution. Despite all the difficulties, putting his education at the center of his life; focused on his studies and is currently top of the class with an average of 3.81. Doing a master's degree and doctorate is among Omar's future goals. He states that his education in the aircraft engineering department in Syria before the war contributed to his success in Turkey.

Omar thinks that he is aware of the rights granted to him in Turkey and that Turkey has contributed a lot to him. He says that he is not discriminated against in any way from the professors he takes lessons from at the university, but almost as brother or siblings. Despite this, he says that sometimes unpleasant things happen. As an example, he describes an unpleasant incident that happened to him in the student environment as follows:

*“Cultural events were held in Karabuk last year. I also attended. Students who were there waved a flag representing their country. So I waved our own flag and a friend took me on his shoulder. At that time, a few of the Turkish youth began to shout. Later, two people came to us and told us to lower the flag. I said to them, ‘Why should I bring it down, I am a citizen of Turkey, but also of Syria. I said, ‘I will neither lower the Turkish flag nor the Syrian flag. They actually wanted us to lower the Turkish flag. Why is that? Because they saw us as foreigners. This made me very sad. I will not give up on Syria or Turkey.’”*

Omar says that he sees Turkey as his second homeland, that it is impossible for a person to renounce his homeland, which is why he does not lower the flag of Syria, his homeland where he was born and raised, and Turkey, where he has made himself a home. Omar currently works in a private business in Karabuk and teaches mathematics to students. He has an order in Karabuk and is taking firm steps forward in his struggle for life. He states that he is grateful to the people who helped him and to the Turkish state for facilitating education. He thinks that he can protect his rights in Turkey, that he is happy and peaceful. Meanwhile, Omar

has a message he wants to convey to everyone:  
“*We are all human...*”

## **ABDULLAH JAMOUS**

Abdullah was born in Syria in 1996. He was living with his family in Deir ez-Zor and continuing his education. With the start of the war, his life changed and he and his family had to leave the place where they lived. Abdullah had lost his home in the war and lost his beloved uncle. They did not want to live in constant fear of being hit or dropped by bombs. The family had no thought of going to another country other than Turkey. Because they had been in Turkey before. Now the decision had been made, Abdullah had to left his house devastated by bombs, his memories covered in dust clouds, the mornings he woke up to the constant sound of clashes, and his beloved uncle. The only thing that comforted he was that he would get rid of the mornings they woke up to the constant sound of conflict.

Thus, the target road was determined to Turkey. Abdullah lived in Mersin for a year, then he enrolled in Karabuk University and settled in this city. His mother and siblings preferred to reside in Ankara. His father was working in Kuwait to earn money. Abdullah did not receive any social or economic support from anywhere. He had to survive on the financial support his father

could provide. Abdullah associates the reason why his father did not stay in Turkey with the low salaries there. In fact, he himself complains about this situation: *“I go to the factory, the employees are always foreigners, but the foreigners do not one but five jobs, and they do not get paid for their efforts despite the work they do.”*

Despite the high living standards in Europe, Abdullah attributes the reason for preferring Turkey to the fact that the majority of the people living here are Muslims, that many Syrian refugees live in the country, and this situation gives him more confidence. Abdullah says that the adaptation process is easier in Turkey compared to other countries, because this ease stems from the similarity of customs and traditions.

Abdullah successfully completed the first five courses he took at the Turkish Language Teaching Center and gained the required level of language proficiency to study Turkish. While learning Turkish, he also learned about his rights in Turkey. He says that he had no previous knowledge on this subject, he did not receive support from any institution or organization, he continued his struggle for life with his own strength, and this situation gave him strength and confidence in

addition to his sadness. Abdullah is satisfied with the city he lives in. He has many friends around him and spends his free time with them. Abdullah is currently studying engineering. What he really wants is to be in more labs.

Abdullah's future anxiety about the period after he finishes university makes him think. *“There is war in my country, what shall I do?”* The question never leaves him alone.

There is something else Abdullah wants to add to his story and wants to ask everyone. The information he read in some books and heard from people in Syria introduced Turkey as an enemy country. He was under the influence of this prejudice until he came to Turkey. When the war started, he came to Turkey and saw that what he thought was wrong and that there was not much difference between them and the Turks. Abdullah; *“Actually, the essence of the point is not to be Turkish or Syrian, but to be human.”* he concludes.

## **WASSAK**

Wassak was born 23 years ago in Baghdad. Her parents worked tirelessly to provide a better life for Wassak and her three siblings. But the conditions were difficult, the city was burning like a doomsday place every day. Bombs were exploding, people were dying, being killed. They were four children who never stopped dreaming in this tragic situation. Purposes; to study and get a job. But the situation was getting worse day by day. Terrorist organizations that took over the city were kidnapping hundreds of people every day, looting their homes and trying to kill people.

Wassak predicted that these events might happen to them one day. The situation had become intolerable; states were fighting, people were dying, and worst of all, they were tortured. Unfortunately, Wassak also suffered from these fears and pains. The ISIS terrorist organization kidnapped her younger brother while she was playing in the middle of the street in broad daylight... The family immediately informed the security forces. Her brother was not heard from for three days. After three days, a phone rang; the caller was an IS member and demanded a ransom to return his brother. When the family reacted, they

poured boiling water on the little boy in front of their eyes. The family could not stand it and accepted the ransom demand. When they sent the money they wanted, they released the boy. The poor boy was burnt all over and he had been tortured by ISIS for three days, left without food and water.

These fears made Wassak's life unbearable. There was no guarantee that similar events would not occur. It was impossible to forget what had happened and return to normal life. There were serious human rights violations in the country all the time. The security forces were ineffective, and there were rumors that some security forces were collaborating with terrorist organizations. There was no one to rely on anymore, death was at their bottom. The only solution was to leave the country, because disasters were incessant. When Wassak and her family were in such a state of mind, when they woke up one morning, another terrible thing happened; this time the terrorist organization kidnapped her brother who went to school. Desperate, the family went to the security forces, but fortunately, they found her brother quickly by acting early. Now ISIS was everywhere.

There was a house and a car owned by the family and they decided to sell them and run away once and for all. This time, the terrorist organization bombed the house and the car in front of the house. So they had to flee without taking anything with them, but one person was missing. Wassak's older sister was studying medicine in Iraq; it was her last year. The young woman made an idealistic decision: she would even risk death and finish school. Her parents set out by placing their eldest daughter with a trusted family.

Wassak and her family entered Turkey illegally in 2014. They didn't have much choice, all they wanted was a safe environment where they could live. They didn't think much about it anyway, they almost knew Turkey. When they came to Turkey, they first went to Ankara, where they completed the necessary procedures and settled in Çankırı, one of the cities presented to them by the Migration Management. However, they could not establish the order they wanted in Çankırı. Because the elders of the family could not find a job and the children could not adapt to the environment. After staying in Çankırı for five months, they settled in Karabuk, another city offered by the Migration Management. The only reason they chose Karabuk was because they

thought there were more job opportunities. It was a small but safe city for them. Wassak and her family were finally able to breathe a sigh of relief.

While the family was people of status in Iraq, they suddenly lost everything they had and became a deserted land, and had to work in jobs they were not accustomed to and did not know. Because they came from Iraq, the people around them were prejudiced against them. Working conditions were also harsh. It was impossible to live on only the money their father earned. In this case, Wassak, her older brother and mother also decided to work. They also enrolled her younger brother in school.

Wassak and her brother wanted to complete their education and have a job, but their financial situation did not allow it. Despite this, she had to be a strong woman and stand on her own feet. Wassak was surprised by the family's reaction when she shared the idea of studying at Karabuk University with some hesitation and some excitement. Her father, who was struggling so that they could study in Iraq, was against them to study in Karabuk because education had a cost. But Wassak had already made up her mind. She will work two jobs and give some of the money she earns to her family, and spend the rest on her

education; so the problem would be solved. Wassak went to work and soon found her second job. She worked as a waitress at weddings in the evenings, worked in textiles until morning, and went to school during the day. It was very tiring days, but she finally started the school life she dreamed of; She won the Mechatronics and Materials Engineering department. Wassak had no problem with Turkish. She had more or less command of the language since she had already lived in Turkey for a year. She made good friends in a short time, so she was happy to be together with good people. Things were going well in the place where she worked, and she even met good people there. These beautiful people loved her very much and adopted her as their daughter. Wassak was happy; she was very tired, but it was worth it. After graduating, she would be able to work as an engineer and would also be proud of her success with her own efforts.

It may not be easy to forget the past, it is also difficult to survive in the grip of material and spiritual difficulties; but those who persevere and strive have a determined stance in life. Wassak is one of the best examples of this. The young woman, who always learned lessons from her experiences, always held on to the positive side of

life and never gave up on her goal. Wassak is currently only looking forward, towards the goal and struggling to realize her dreams.

## **MOHAMMED HUSEYNI**

Mohammed Husseini's immigration story, originally from Afghanistan, dates back to his childhood years. The long-lasting Afghan civil war forced many Afghan citizens to emigrate as well as Mohammed's family, and the family migrated to Iran. Mohammed also opened his eyes to life here.

Over time, Mohammed and his family decided to leave this country because of the Iranian government's attitude towards Afghan citizens, and they preferred Turkey because it is close to Iran. Mohammed and his family, who came to Turkey from Iran, first went to Van and then to Ankara. It seemed that this difficult journey would never end. Thanks to the United Nations Office of Migration in Ankara and institutions in Turkey, they came to Trabzon, after staying here for a day, they went to Kayseri. Time will show if Kayseri will be the last station. First, they settled in a house in Kayseri with their father, mother, four sisters and a brother. Since his father was 73 years old and a sick man, Mohammed and his two older sisters had to work. They looked for a job for a long time, eventually one of his older sisters worked as a tailor and the other at an ironer, and Mohammed started to work in the organized industrial zone.

While Mohammed was working, he was thinking about what to do about his education. He was very committed to education. He was preparing for the Foreign Student Exam after work and on holidays. His aim was to enroll in Erciyes University. As a result of intense and disciplined work, he got a good score in the Foreign Student Exam and won Erciyes University. He won, but he had to work at the same time to earn a living. However, he could not get a job due to the pandemic that swept the world since March.

Mohammed is satisfied with the city he lives in, his environment and his neighbors; there is always someone to turn to when something is needed. Currently, he is struggling to earn enough financial income to support his family while continuing his university education. So, Mohammed wants to read; despite everything...

## **AHMET KAYSER**

Ahmet Kayser was born in 1996 in Mosul, Iraq. His father was a computer engineer at a good company in Dubai; in this way, he was able to finish primary and secondary school in Mosul without experiencing financial difficulties. He also wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a computer engineer. Ahmet was dreaming about his future as a successful student in high school.

While everything was going so well for the Kayser family, the Arab Spring started to show its effect in Syria in 2010. The dreams and hopes of the Kayser family were destroyed and their lives turned upside down. Ahmet's father feared that the conflict would spread to Iraqi soil and that his family would be caught in the middle of the conflict.

Ahmet, who was preparing for the university exams, was sent to Kirkuk by his father. Because the family had previously carried out several attacks on Mosul by ISIS, so the family was in fear. Two of the four houses they owned were destroyed during the fighting. Iraq was now in a spiral of violence and war. Ahmet's father moved to Baghdad, taking his wife and children with him.

Baghdad was better protected as it was the capital of the country; it was safer as it is, at least that's what the Kayser family thought.

They lived in Baghdad for a while, the family was still worried. Ahmet took the university exam in Baghdad. Without waiting for the exam results, he convinced his father and applied for a visa to go to Egypt. But his visa was denied by the Egyptian government. As conflicts escalated in the country, Ahmet's father decided to send his family out of the country one by one. At that time, Ahmet's exam results were announced. His score was at least good enough to study in neighboring countries. That's why Ahmet was the first to leave the country. He was just 18 at the time. After the procedures carried out by the relevant authorities, he was sent to Ankara. He was supposed to go to the Immigration Administration, but he did not know where the administration was. He had to ask someone around, but because he did not know Turkish, he had a hard time explaining his problem. Finally, he found someone who spoke English, and he was able to go to the Immigration Administration after that person's description. After the necessary procedures, he settled in the province of Zonguldak.

Ahmet was able to communicate with his family after long efforts, but the situation in Iraq was very bad. Bombs were exploding in the city every day. Ahmet tried to persuade his family to come to Turkey by stating that the situation is good in Turkey and that the Turkish authorities and people welcomed him well. But it was extremely difficult for them to reach the Turkish border.

Because of the financial and psychological problems he was in, Ahmet had completely abandoned his plans for education. He wanted to save money and go to America as soon as possible. He started the necessary contacts for this, worked in restaurants and even in construction to realize his dream, but had to suspend his plan to go to America due to some special reasons. Then he decided to study at a university in Turkey, so he continued his education life from where he left off. After the exam he took, he won the right to choose universities in the cities of Zonguldak, Karabuk and Trabzon. Since his father was a computer engineer, he wanted his son to choose the Mechatronics Engineering Department. Ahmet eventually chose Karabuk University, registered and moved to Karabuk.

In Ahmet's eyes, Karabuk was very different from Zonguldak. This place was better than Zonguldak in terms of student capacity and hosted a large number of foreign students. Naturally, Ahmet was able to communicate better with these students, and even as a translator because he knew English. In this way, he established his order in Karabuk and continued his education comfortably. While trying to get used to the new order, he made friends from different nationalities. Ahmet does not think that he only needs to be friends with Iraqis in order to feel safe and says:

*“As long as it's human. It doesn't matter whether he is Muslim, Christian, Arab or Turkish. After all, being human is enough for me. It is not for me to talk about things such as "You are Iraqi, I will come to you, you are of another race, and I will not contact you." After all, we are human and humans make mistakes. For example, are all five fingers on a hand the same? I don't know if I can feel safe when there are Iraqis that trust depends on people. Maybe I can feel more secure when I'm with a Turkish friend. So it is important for me to be human.”*

Ahmet is worried about his own future. Because he is successful, he receives job offers

from Germany, Iraq and Turkey and tries to evaluate them. Would he want to return or go to another country from Turkey if the turmoil and security problem in his country is resolved? Ahmet says he doesn't know. He's left it to time. After that night that completely changed his life, Ahmet's only thought is to live the moment he is in.

## **RAMA**

Living in Aleppo, Rama's teenage years coincided with an unfortunate time: the civil war broke out in Syria. Exploding bombs and the sound of fire forced Rama and her family to emigrate, and they immigrated to Turkey on September 20, 2012. The main reason they chose Turkey was that, besides being a direct neighbor, it was the only country that opened its border gates to Syrians. Rama and her family first came to the Cilvegözü border gate by car. After a long wait, they took a step to Turkey. Other members of the family had to continue their lives in Damascus, Aleppo and Idlib. From time to time, they tried to relieve their longing by meeting on the internet from time to time.

Rama and her family first came to their family friends living in the Reyhanlı district of Hatay, and from there they went to Yozgat to meet with her father's friend. Her father worked in Çankırı/Çerkeş for two years, then they came to Kayseri, their last stop as a family. They received help from many people while getting their identity cards from the Provincial Migration Administration. After coming to Turkey, Rama; she started to continue her life with her mother,

father and brother. Like every immigrant family, they faced many problems. Rama and her brother were saddened every morning from the window watching the children getting on the bus to school. The family was very upset as they did not know how to enroll their children in which school. In this case, the neighbor Osman Bey intervened; he greatly helped Rama and her brother go to school, and the brothers were able to continue their education.

Rama initially faced many problems at school; there were days when it was not included in games and photographs. The constant presence of her mother and especially Rama's efforts accelerated the adaptation process. It wasn't hard for Rama to learn Turkish, as she had a good command of English besides her mother tongue. Having a large number of foreign students in her school was an advantage for Rama in this sense. In secondary school, some literature teachers were asking Rama easier questions than Turkish students in order to help her learn the language. Also, Rama was luckier than other immigrants in terms of adaptation; Her friends such as Kübra, Yeliz, Gamze, and Emir were helping him in many matters. As a result, Rama and her family were able to adapt to Turkey, albeit with difficulty.

Rama successfully completed her high school education and was entitled to enter the Department of Sociology at Istanbul University. Since she came to Turkey at the age of high school, she did not need to take Turkish preparation when she started university and she started the department directly. When Rama was asked why she chose the Department of Sociology, she said: *“I don't know the answer to this question, actually sociology is a growing need that met me somewhere”* and stated that she chose sociology in order to understand the society she lived in.

Rama describes her difficulties as *“they are what made me who I am”*. She says that whenever she encounters any exclusion or a negative attitude towards immigrants, she will intervene immediately, shape her future life on this and be the voice of immigrants.

Rama has various worries about the future; she does not know where and in what environment she will be tomorrow. But she is trying to stand on her own feet. She says that even though the civil war in Syria is over, she can only go to her country to defend human rights or to work as a sociologist. Except for these reasons, she does not want to return to Syria. As a matter of fact, Rama feels that

she belongs to Turkey because she embraces multiculturalism, but she has the thought of immigrating to another country with her family.

## **SHEBAB HAZBAR**

Shebab Hazbar was born in Yemen in 1998. When he completed his primary and high school, the situation in his country was not improving. Yemen was dragged into war more and more with each passing day. Shebab began to fear this confusion. He wanted a better education; so he decided to immigrate to another country. He thought that studying abroad would be more beneficial for him.

Shebab was the son of a religious family. That's why he chose Turkey, where he could live his faith comfortably. He wanted to be an engineer. He won the Mechatronics Engineering department at a good university and then came to Turkey in 2016 with great excitement. Now he would receive education in a more comfortable environment, and he would also learn Turkish. From the day he arrived, he always felt like a stranger because he had no friends. But soon everything started to fall into order. At school, his teachers and classmates were kind to Shebab. Therefore, the adaptation process was not difficult. He was able to solve the language problem in a short time by registering at the Turkish Teaching Center. He did not have any difficulties in his lessons, and he gained an

environment where he could live his faith comfortably. He is happy with his life, even though he feels like a stranger.

Shebab is currently struggling to meet its financial needs. Unfortunately, it does not receive any support from international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations. He tries to continue his student life with the help of his family. That's why he never thought of working in Turkey. He decided to move on from day one, focusing only on his education, he. He has made several friends: traveling with them, studying and having fun. Making friends with Syrians makes him feel safer and communicate better. He does not face any reaction when he speaks his own language; his interlocutors simply ask where he is from and in any case treat him well.

Shebab works with determination and zeal as it aims to stay in Turkey after graduation and get graduate and doctorate education. His biggest dream is to return to his country after completing his education and to find a job and work.

Shebab says that he will never forget his friendships in Turkey, and that one of the values that makes him happy here is good friendships. Emphasizing that it is not easy to overcome

problems alone, he especially underlines that his friends support him. Despite everything, his longing and dreams that he wants to realize force him to return to Yemen. That is why he is waiting for the day when he will go to his country after successfully graduating.

## **ATIQULLAH BEHROZ**

Atiqullah Behroz was born in Afghanistan in 1995. He's had a tough life. The reason was not only because he was born in a country that has been struggling with social, political and economic problems for many years. Atiqullah has always been excluded and marginalized because he is ethnically Turkmen. He studied, struggled, and despite all the difficulties, he won the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences and graduated from a university in Afghanistan with a traditional education model.

Atiqullah was deprived of many rights in Afghanistan. During the Russian occupation in 1979, his father was in the army and, as he says, still cannot return to his *“home”*. In the words of Atiqullah; He decided to come to Turkey because he had to live *“a wanderer in his own country”*. He set out alone in the last months of 2017. Before he set off, he promised his mother that he would go to Turkey and continue his education. Thus began a long and painful journey. After crossing the border with great difficulties, he took his first step into his immigration life. He first came to Düzce, then went to Ankara and applied for international protection. He settled in Karabuk

with the guidance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Of course, living in another country has some rules. Atiqullah had to live his life by following these rules. So what are these rules? For example, he had to get permission before going out of the city and have the necessary procedures done. Since he graduated from the Faculty of Law, he did not have much difficulty in learning his rights as an immigrant in Turkey. He obtained the first information from the brochures given by the governorship. He was successful in many exams he took after receiving an international protection ID. Keeping the promise he made to his mother, he enrolled in the master's program in the Department of Regional Studies at Karabuk University in Turkey. Since he is Turkmen, he did not have much difficulty in language, thanks to the education he received at the Turkish Teaching Center, he further consolidated his grammar. Atiqullah, who learned English during his undergraduate education, was satisfied with his professors at the university. He expresses his gratitude and gratitude to them with these words: *“My teachers were very compassionate and loving people. It would have been very difficult without their support. They tried to solve all my problems.*

*So I'm very happy and I love them all very much..."*

His friends around him say that he often calls him "Ati". Ati shared the same place with his two, sometimes three friends in the house he rented in Karabuk. He feels more advantageous and belongs here because he is Muslim and Turkmen in Turkey, where he lives as an immigrant. He does not receive social and economic support from any institution and organization, he sometimes does daily work in Karabuk and his family supports him as much as he can. However, his living needs and the 1800 TL tuition fee he pays to the school every semester puts Ati very hard.

One of the important points that attracted Ati's attention was the very different perspective on women in Turkey compared to Afghanistan: *"Both women's perspectives on men and men on women are very different. So they are incomparably different. Ati expresses his wish by saying that I want Afghanistan to be like in Turkey."* He has a similar opinion about the law enforcement officers in Turkey: *"I can say that the members of the law enforcement officers in Turkey are perhaps the most reliable and friendly people in the world. I would never hesitate to ask them for an address or*

*anything. They also listen to me in a good, humane, friendly way and try to solve my problem.”*

Persons applying for international protection have the right to apply to a third country as long as they are in Turkey. Some have made such applications, but as a Turkmen, Ati says that he does not feel the need to make such an application because he feels safe in Turkey. He wants to stay here; *“Because I am Turkmen, blood drew me here”* he says. Stating that he has the opportunity to do everything he can for Afghanistan by living in Turkey, Ati tries to convey what he knows to Afghan youth over the internet.

Ati says that he observes the events he encounters or develops around him, and learns something at every opportunity:

*“One day, someone told me a few things to inform, guided me, and then said, 'You still know.' That was my favorite word. So it says 'you are young, you have an opinion and decide for yourself what is good and what is not. This made me very happy. They force us to do many things. They don't say "do it by thinking about yourself", they put pressure on both religious and other issues. The*

*sentence 'you know' suggests to me that I should think about the decision I'm going to make."*

Continuing his life as a doctoral student in Turkey at the moment, Ati communicates with his family and friends, sometimes via video and sometimes audio, and satisfies his longing to some extent. At the end of our meeting, Ati conveys something he is happy about as follows:

*"What makes me happy is the compassionate and loving behavior of my teachers. Apart from that, sometimes old women in Turkey ask me 'why did you come?' and 'what do you want to do?' After I explain my purpose, they say to me, 'May God give it to your heart' this sentence makes me very happy. Because I've never heard of such a thing before. When I hear this, I come to myself and I am happy."*

## **WEFAA**

Wefaa's difficult life story began 20 years ago with the sound of bombs exploding in Aleppo. His family settled in Deir ez-Zor to escape the civil war that was getting more intense every day. But the situation here was not much different. Living in constant fear, waking up to a new disaster, had made the life of Wefaa and her family unbearable. It was almost impossible for her to get an education. However, Wefaa was a person who loved to read and risked all kinds of sacrifices, even death, on this path. Each time she left the house in fear; because the armed men in the city would intercept people outside, oppress and use violence. That's why, like the others, Wefaa couldn't go anywhere, couldn't even go to the hospital in case of need, and was patient to the last point. Because death was at the tip of your nose. Armed militants were everywhere. Wefaa could not go out without a veil on her face; she had to hide her face, because that's what the armed men wanted. It was out of the question to dare to raise the slightest objection against the militants. Unfortunately, these cruel and ravenous people were cruel enough to do all kinds of evil. Wefaa has repeatedly witnessed violent incidents, many times the kidnapping of young children playing in

the street in front of their eyes. The terrorist organization put guns in the hands of boys and recruited them, killed girls and sold their organs, or made them slaves.

Wefaa had dreams and goals. Wefaa's greatest desire was to build a home for her family; A house that will never be destroyed. Her father worked day and night to educate his children and ensure that they received a good education. But under these conditions, it was impossible for their children to receive a good education in Syria. For this reason, he was not willing to let his young and dreamy children live face to face with death; He saw the only solution is to run away. They would immigrate to Turkey.

Her father and younger brother went first; because they weren't supposed to attract attention. In 2015, Wefaa, her mother and younger sister set out. They did not take any belongings with them, they only had IDs on them. They got in a car and fled under the pretext of visiting relatives. They continued on foot, a little before the border. Her father was waiting for her family in Mersin. They crossed the border and went straight to Mersin.

Their life in Mersin was not bad, but they moved to Ankara because they had difficulty

adapting to the environment here. Opportunities in Ankara were more, most importantly, they felt safe. Wefaa completed her high school education at the school she just started. She adapted to school in a short time. Her teachers were telling Wefaa about the subjects she was missing in her spare hours.

After completing her high school education in Ankara, she enrolled in Karabuk University to get her dream job as an architect. She did not have much difficulty in language, she already had a certain command of Turkish. She also learned fluent English and beginner French while living in Syria. It helped her to communicate with immigrants like herself in her native Arabic language.

Wefaa has now established itself in Karabuk; she works part-time and continues her education. She says she left behind what happened before. Her only goal is to build the house of her dreams and live in peace and happiness with her family. For this, she dreams of completing her education and getting her diploma as soon as possible.

**YAMAN**

Yaman was born in 2000 in Saudi Arabia. Yaman, who is originally from Syria, expresses his goals as follows: *“I lived in Saudi Arabia for six years. My goal is to return to Syria after I finish my school. Because it is my homeland and I want to be useful to my homeland.”*

Due to the war, Yaman could not continue his education in his country and had to take refuge in Turkey. He says he prefers this place because he thinks it is close to culture and easy access to education. Yaman's journey started in 2017. He first came to Istanbul and then to Karabuk. His father remained in Syria.

Yaman took the exams in Turkey and won Karabuk University. He says that he did not have any problems with the teaching staff at the university and that foreign students were treated very well here.

Yaman, who previously worked as both a designer and a seller in Saudi Arabia, is currently working on the internet in Turkey; On the one hand, he continues his education while working as a part-time translator online. Yaman thinks making money online is very easy. Although he states that his financial situation in Saudi Arabia is better than

today, he thinks that the social life in Turkey is much better.

He states that social restrictions are imposed on people in Saudi Arabia, and there is no such thing in Turkey. While talking about the social situation of women in Turkey and Arabia, Yaman makes the following observation: *“Comparing with the situation of women in Arabia, I can say that women are valued more in Turkey. The problems in Saudi Arabia are much more.”*

He says that while he was speaking Arabic to his fellow countrymen in Turkey, he did not receive any negative reaction from the people around him, and that the viewpoint of the people around him did not change because he was an Arab.

Yaman knew some English before coming to Turkey. Although he had difficulties while learning Turkish, he quickly mastered the language. First, he had the opportunity to practice by studying at the Turkish Teaching Center; He read books, watched TV series and adopted the language by talking to his Turkish friends. Yaman, who says that he can easily live the customs and traditions in Turkey, states that there is not much difference in this regard. When we ask him if there

has been any event that has upset him or made him very happy since he came to Turkey, he replied: *“I have come across some people's prejudices. Of course this upset me. For example, my roommate was extremely biased towards me in the dorm I was staying at. He would never talk to me or even greet me. But over time, he started to get to know me, and we even got along well.”*

Overcoming the difficulties he faced, Yaman still lives in Turkey.

**AHMET**

Living in Afghanistan, Ahmet's <sup>22</sup>dream since childhood was to start a business and trade. Ahmet always grew up with this desire. He worked diligently to finish high school for the sake of his goal. He successfully finished his school, but he could not live the happiness of it. Because he thought he wasn't safe enough in his country anymore. That's why he decided to emigrate after finishing high school. Making this decision was not difficult at all. Because he was very successful in his classes. He had a high chance of getting a scholarship from the institutions or organizations he applied for.

Afghanistan was going through a difficult time. The people were under pressure from the Taliban on the grounds that they did not comply with the order. Ahmet, who thinks that living in the country has become unbearable; He decided to go abroad and get an education there as soon as possible and set up a routine for himself. He entered a busy work environment and got high scores in exams. With this score, he won a scholarship to study in India, Turkey and Malaysia. He wanted to study civil engineering. As

---

<sup>22</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name "Ahmet" was used in the story.

a result of his research, he preferred Turkey, which he thought was good in the field of construction. Likewise, Turkey's education system was similar to the education system in European countries in many ways. Another important point was that Ahmet thought that he could easily live his own culture in Turkey. Finally, he arrived in Istanbul in 2014. It was very difficult at first because he did not know Turkish. In Turkey, he was only seeing and staying with his Afghan friends. He needed to fix the language problem as soon as possible. He regularly followed the Turkish language education of the university and was constantly practicing. Meanwhile, Ahmet also had a good friend environment. He was getting information from them about the rights granted to him, the places he could work, the institutions and associations he could get scholarships or assistance from.

Despite all kinds of troubles and difficulties, Ahmet loved Turkey very much. Ahmet says that he feels free and safe in this country, he is surprised to see that a woman and a man walk hand in hand while walking on the street, that he receives education together with female students in the classroom, and that people of different nationalities and beliefs live together in an environment of tolerance. He adds that this was

once the case in his own country, but in time, the Taliban seized everything and people became unable to hold their spouse's hand on the street, they could not go out, and schools were separated by gender... Ahmet calls his family in Afghanistan and tells what he saw, experienced and heard. When he calls his family, he sometimes gets frightened, and he has all kinds of doubts about whether his parents are alive or not. One time, while looking for his family, Ahmed learned that his uncle had been kidnapped by the Taliban. He loved his uncle very much; when he heard this news, his world fell apart. If possible, he would do his best to return to his country and save him; but soon after he got the news of his uncle's death, his world was turned upside down, he couldn't recover for a long time. After this incident, he started to worry more about his family. Fortunately, he was somewhat relieved when his family moved to Mazar-i-Sharif, a more central and safe area in Afghanistan.

After Ahmet completed his Turkish language education in Istanbul, he moved to Afyonkarahisar for university education. Compared to Istanbul, Afyon was a very small and ordinary city for him, so he adapted to the city in a short time. In the first year of university, his classes were bad because his

Turkish was not good and this was affecting his classes negatively. But when he came to the second grade, he solved the language problem and started to get good grades in the exams. Of course, his teachers had a great influence on this. The fact that he learned Turkish at a sufficient level made Ahmet's life much easier. Now he got on well with his neighbors and shopkeepers around him, and he even worked as a translator for the Turkish security forces because he knew English and Persian. Ahmet was very happy when he learned that his wife could also enter Turkey in the same year. He couldn't sleep with excitement, because he hadn't seen his wife for over two years. He could not see not only his wife, but also no one from his family...

Ahmet suffered a lot of financial difficulties in Turkey, he could not work in a comfortable job. Because he was a foreign student, he could not get a work permit. The institutions and organizations to which he applied asked the Immigration Administration to bring a letter, but it was not legally possible for him to receive such a document as he was a student. A short time later, Ahmet and his wife opened a real estate office with the money that his wife had saved and their brothers sent. Ahmet continued his lessons and

helped his wife when he was away from school. Over time, they also had a daughter. When everything was going well, a misfortune occurred. Ahmet came to the office to help his wife after leaving school. At that time, one of the law enforcement officers came in and asked for the workplace certificate. Of course, there was no such document as there was no work permit. After due legal proceedings, Ahmet and his family were deported and sent to Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan was extremely bad. Almost all of the regions were under the control of the Taliban. Members of the armed organization were blocking roads and collecting money. Despite the difficult situation in Afghanistan, the condition of Ahmet's brothers was not bad. They mobilized in a short time and helped Ahmet and his family to go to Turkey. Ahmet and his wife were able to return to Turkey by obtaining a student visa again; they settled in Afyon again.

Currently, Ahmet is in the last year. He wants to graduate and start master degree as soon as possible. If he continues his education, he will gain the right to legal residence in Turkey for a while, and thus he will have the opportunity to start a business.

Ahmet, who lives a difficult immigrant life, says that despite everything, he is happy with his family. Ahmet's biggest desire is to start a business after graduation. Another wish is for the Taliban regime to end in Afghanistan.

**IBRAHIM ALAHMAD**

Ibrahim was born in 1995 in Deir ez-Zor, Syria. He lived a simple, ordinary life with his daily joys and bustle: he went to school and had a good time with his friends from time to time. When he was 16 years old, turmoil broke out in his country. He was very young then; He didn't have time to understand what was going on around him. The turmoil quickly turned into an armed conflict between the regime and the opposition. Various terrorist organizations, especially ISIS, were constantly attacking the city where Ibrahim lived. When Ibrahim was 20 years old, he understood the seriousness of the situation better and realized that he could no longer continue his education in the city where he was born and grew up. His survival, let alone education, was in doubt.

Before long, his father was killed in the civil war. Ibrahim decided to immigrate to another country to live and continue his education. The closest country to which he could seek asylum was Turkey, Syria's border neighbor. He came to Turkey in 2015. His primary goal was to complete his unfinished education. With this in mind, he enrolled in the Department of Civil Engineering at Karabuk University. This is how he took his first step into his immigration life. Regardless, he decided to finish his degree and graduate, but he

had one more problem to solve; He should have a good command of Turkish. He immediately registered at the Turkish Teaching Center. But the course was not enough for him to learn Turkish well. That's why he prioritized practicing with his Turkish friends outside of the course. In this way, learning Turkish became easier.

Today, Ibrahim successfully continues his university education. Ibrahim needs to earn money in order to continue school, make a living and cover his expenses. It does not receive any scholarship from any domestic or foreign institution and organization. Therefore, he has to earn his pocket money by working at low wages in small jobs. In the first days when he came to Turkey, people would look at him in surprise when he spoke his own language. Over time, both the local people and Ibrahim got used to this situation.

Ibrahim thinks that he has adapted to Turkey in a short time. His brothers living in Istanbul are the only source of motivation in this regard. Ibrahim's mother currently lives in Syria and visits her children in Turkey whenever she gets the chance.

Despite everything, Ibrahim is happy to be in Turkey. Even if the war in Syria ends, he is

determined not to go there and to continue his life in Turkey from now on.

**SAID ABRAR**

Said was born in Afghanistan in 1993. He was studying law in his country and working in a communication company at the same time. He had a normal life in his own right, but was disturbed by the internal turmoil and disorder in the education system in his country. That's why he wanted to immigrate to another country to get a better education. India, a geographically close country, was also among their preferences. There were other options as well. But in terms of his life and future, he preferred Turkey. There were also some of his family and friends here. Thus, Said set out as an immigrant and met with his relatives in Turkey. They were longing for it, as they had been away from each other for 4-5 years. Afterwards, he studied language at Ankara University Turkish Teaching Center for eight months. The most difficult thing; financial difficulties and not having sufficient command of Turkish. Although he had difficulties in language learning for a while, he improved his reading, writing and speaking skills over time. This determination provided him with motivation: Besides learning Persian, Uzbek, Hindi and English, he also learned Turkish. After Ankara, he resided in Istanbul for a while, then settled in Karabuk.

Said has been residing in Turkey for a year and a half now. The social adaptation process of Said, who has a determined and hardworking character, did not take long. Although he faced many problems at first, he was able to overcome it on his own. Already before he came, he was aware of the difficulties he would face in his immigration life and accepted these difficulties psychologically. The biggest factor that facilitated Said's adaptation to society was that he was Uzbek and the cultural similarity between the two communities.

The thing that bothered Said the most in Turkey was the strange looks that some people gave him when a different language was spoken, and he couldn't make sense of it. Although this strangeness was not at the level of a negative reaction, it did bother him as a result. He says that he is used to this situation now, that he has no problems with communication, and that the Immigration Administration helps him when he wants to get information on certain issues or solve the problems he encounters.

His mother, father and close friends, whom he misses, live in Afghanistan. He tries to satisfy this longing from time to time by meeting on the internet. Although this situation affects his

psychology, he does not think of returning to his hometown without completing his education. He feels luckier than his friends in Afghanistan because he is in Turkey. He no longer wants to live in a country where crisis and turmoil prevail, economic problems do not end, and there are constant incidents of war and terrorism.

Continuing his master's degree at Karabuk University, Said says he is satisfied with his faculty and classmates. He also sees it as an achievement that the diploma he will receive in Turkey is valid in his own country. Currently, his only occupation in Karabuk is education and he wants to start a doctorate after finishing his master's program. The habit of reading, which he acquired from a young age, still continues; this undoubtedly adds important things to Said's development. Seeing the places mentioned in the history books with his own eyes when he is studying in undergraduate makes Said very happy.

Said, whose fate was destined to emigrate, sincerely believes that he will achieve a bright future thanks to his efforts.

**MOHAMAD NAJEEB**

Mohamad Najeeb had a quiet life with his family in the Syrian province of Damascus. Born in 1992, Mohamad was studying at the Department of Surveying Engineering in Syria. He had a happy life with his friends, school and family. How could he have known that all of a sudden his life would fall apart, his teenage years would be ruthlessly swept away...

The war started suddenly. Mohamad was nervous, not knowing what to do. Where fate would lead him, whether he would live or be killed, he was being dragged into a whirlpool of uncertainty, fear and panic. He had to make radical decisions as soon as possible, because his education was interrupted by the war. Every second that passed was working against him. Everything could end at any moment. In this turmoil, he thought that Turkey was the country he could go to the shortest way without thinking good, bad, logical or illogical, and he set out in 2014. Leaving his family behind, he reached Mersin by sea. He followed his dreams and walked towards his goal.

His primary goal was to start university education. He won the Department of English Language and Literature at Karabuk University.

He was happy, but being away from his family kept his mind busy. He was dreaming himself; He would graduate from school, find a job, and help his family. Maybe he would be able to see them again after six years... Unfortunately, the account at home did not fit the market. Mohamad had to get permission not only to go to his country and see his family, but even to go to another city from the province he was in. After completing his four-year undergraduate education, which continued with longing and difficulties, he started his graduate program at Karabuk University. The fact that he was left alone with unemployment and financial difficulties on the one hand, and on the other hand, could not return to his country and could not move anywhere in Turkey, made Mohamad's life even more difficult. Actually, he had a dream of going abroad, but for some reason he couldn't do it either.

Mohamad says that some people in Turkey are not satisfied with the arrival of Syrians here, and he takes this situation naturally: *“There are good and bad Syrians among them. As the Syrians continued to come to Turkey, bad people began to emerge from among them. When some people see bad things, they think we are all bad and they can act discriminatory. Who wants to leave the lands*

*where he was born and grew up, to move away from his home and homeland, to live with the longing for his family... ”*

Mohamad says that he has gotten used to Turkey, has adapted to the society, and has adopted the customs and traditions of this place. For example, he prefers Turkish coffee, like Turks, rather than Arabic coffee.

Before, he communicated with his surroundings, mostly by speaking English, but over time he learned Turkish as well. Now he has left himself to the flow of life, to the hands of fate. One way or another, the water will flow and find its way. He has to find... Mohamad believes that one day the darkness will give way to the light and he will be freed from the dead end he is in. The war is still going on in his country. He is trying to hold on to life in the grip of unemployment and financial difficulties in Turkey. Circumstances do not allow him to go abroad, and there is no place where he can get financial support.

## **MUHAMMED JOUDA**

Muhammed was born 22 years ago in Idlib, Syria. Due to his father's job, he moved to Arabia

with his family in 2015 and lived here for three years. Their emigration to Saudi Arabia was not a necessity or an escape, but because of their father's job.

Muhammed had a comfortable life in Syria before the war. The financial situation of his family was very good. When the war broke out, he did not stay in Syria for a long time, and after a year he went to Saudi Arabia. He stayed there for three years and then came to Turkey in 2018. The biggest factor in her choosing Turkey was that her friends also received education in this country. Another important factor was that Muhammed was interested in a different language in which the Latin alphabet was used. Thanks to this curiosity, he would learn Turkish better in the future. In summary, Turkey was not a compulsory country for Muhammed, it was a country he came to on his own request and directly for educational purposes.

The only reason he chose Karabuk was that his friends had also studied at this university. Muhammed says that he loves Karabuk, that he is happy here, that he did not go out of Karabuk during the four years he was in Turkey. While other immigrants who left their country because of necessity cannot communicate with family

members and friends, Muhammed keeps in touch with his family living in Saudi Arabia whenever he wants. This gives him a lot of psychological relief. In some cases, he talks about the negativities he faced due to coming to Turkey by obtaining a visa, although he may be more advantageous than other immigrants. While other asylum seeker students receive support from Turkey in matters such as health, social security and scholarships, he states that he has to pay for these services. He does not receive any scholarship or support from any institution, he says that he only has to live on a certain amount of money his father sent.

In addition to his university education, Muhammed also works in a restaurant, but is experiencing financial difficulties due to the pandemic. He had no previous working experience in either Syria or Saudi Arabia. That's why, although he had a hard time getting used to business life at first, he was able to overcome this obstacle later on. He says he is satisfied with his life; therefore, he does not think of returning to Saudi Arabia, where his family lives, and wants to spend the rest of his life in Turkey, where he came to study. He says that he lives his religious belief comfortably, that he does not encounter any problems regarding his own customs and

traditions, and that he is determined to continue his life in Turkey from now on. His life in Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest factors in making this decision. Despite having a common language, religion and culture with the people there, he was subjected to a lot of discrimination by the local people. Let alone being treated as foreigners by people speaking the same language, the fact that even the basic human right of education was not given to him was very upsetting to Muhammed. His attainment of this right further increased Muhammed's love for Turkey. Muhammed does not remember that he faced any discrimination after coming here. "*Why don't you speak Turkish?*" was asked by some when he spoke only his own language. He says that he was subjected to such criticism, but that he did not care much about it.

Muhammed thinks that the education given in Turkey is better than in Syria, of which he is a citizen. Although he received language training at the Turkish Teaching Center, he states that this training is not enough to master the language. The primary goal of Muhammed is to have full command of the language of a country where he lived and decided to live in the future. He says that at first, the biggest problem he encountered during

his adaptation to society and school was the language problem, but he solved this problem in a short time, and the teachers he took lessons from during this process also helped him. The only question that occupies his mind about education is whether the diploma he received here will be valid when he returns to his country.

According to Muhammed, he thinks that Turkish people are tolerant towards immigrants and that only a part of them is prejudiced. A person he met and talked to on social media recently, changed his attitude after learning that Muhammed was a Syrian citizen, "*You came here and took our job from us, why don't you fight in your own country?*" He thinks that he is on my unfair site. Muhammed thinks the truth of the matter is very different. Emphasizing that the Syrians are struggling to survive in their own country, that the Turkish state opens its doors when they are desperately facing death, and that the Turkish people take care of them, Muhammed says that he will always be grateful to Turkey.

**YASER**

Yaser<sup>23</sup> lived in Yemen until he immigrated to Turkey in 2014. The reason he migrated was to get a better education. Yaser had hesitations about coming to Turkey at first; but he preferred Turkey because of the cultural similarity between the peoples, as well as the thought that he could get quality education as a result of the research he made on the internet. At first he faced some problems with language. As a matter of fact, the six-month period in which he studied Turkish education was insufficient in this sense.

After an intense and disciplined study program, Yaser won the Faculty of Medicine of Afyon Kocatepe University. He does not receive a scholarship from any institution or organization in Turkey. Education expenses are covered by the Yemeni Government. Yaser thinks that studying in a foreign country is very difficult. Likewise, he competes with successful students, sometimes he has to study until the morning. Yaser states that he even thought of quitting when he first started the faculty, and that his lack of understanding of the classes affects him psychologically. However, Yaser continued his struggle despite everything

---

<sup>23</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Yaser” was used in the story.

and continued on his way by getting help from his classmates when necessary. Yaser thinks that the professors at the university treat foreign students well and that he is lucky in this regard. He is very satisfied with the education he received here: he takes theoretical and practical courses, and can also undergo surgeries. Therefore, he finds it more beneficial to study in Turkey than in his own country.

Yaser says that he got used to the city he lived in, Afyon in a short time, and that he had difficulties only in the first six months. He attributes the reason for this to the language problem and the different food culture. He emphasizes that there are very clear differences between the clothing cultures of Yemen and Turkey. He thinks that there are many similarities in culture, customs and traditions. He thinks that when he speaks Arabic, he encounters strange looks from the people around him, and this situation reduces his sense of self-confidence.

Yaser, who continues his sixth year at the Faculty of Medicine, has now solved his language problem, and he does not have difficulty in classes as before. He says that he will not interrupt his education after graduating from the faculty and

that he will become a specialist by taking the Medical Specialization Training Exam. He plans to return to his country after receiving his specialization diploma. Because his family, whom he misses and has not seen for a long time, is waiting for him. In order for this great meeting to take place, Yaser continues his education with determination, stability and determination; He is looking forward to the day he will be reunited with his family.

**AHMET M.**

Ahmet was born in Syria in 1996. The date when the Arab Spring spread to Syria was the beginning of troubled days for Ahmet and his family. Ahmet's greatest desire was to receive a quality education, but this desire did not come true because of the war. It became impossible for him to get an education by living in his own country. That's why he decided to emigrate. He had several options for countries to which he could migrate. He thought about it and decided to go to Turkey. Because he lived in Idlib, a border city. He also thought that he could benefit from the rights granted to Syrian refugees in Turkey. He set out; He fled the war, the bombs and the suffering, but his family remained in Syria, in the middle of that ring of fire. Ahmet first came to Istanbul, after a short time he enrolled in the undergraduate program at Karabuk University to continue his education. In the face of the difficulties he experienced, the tolerant treatment of his teachers at school increased Ahmet's sense of responsibility even more. The fact that the education system in the country he came from is similar to the one in Turkey also gave Ahmet an advantage.

He worked in a restaurant to earn a living. He quickly got used to the working conditions and business environment in Turkey. Although the

difficulties he faced in the early days disturbed him psychologically, he was instrumental in learning his rights as an immigrant. He expresses whether there was any discrimination against him in the following words: “*There has never been such a thing.*” He says that Turkey and international organizations benefit from the social and economic support provided to asylum seekers and migrants. Benefiting from health services is of vital importance for Ahmet, who has kidney disease.

The cultural closeness between the two communities was one of the factors that made it easier for Ahmet to adapt to the environment and society. When he first arrived, he had to communicate in Arabic because he did not know Turkish. Having sufficient command of Turkish; it would offer him important opportunities in terms of establishing a new order, sustaining his life and getting an education. Realizing this, starting his education at the university on the one hand, learning Turkish by enrolling in the Turkish Teaching Center on the other hand, and having a solid environment in which he could communicate, on the other hand, were a great achievement for Ahmet.

Seeing that the environment and living conditions in the city were suitable over time, Ahmet brought his family to Karabuk. Even if the war is over, he does not think of leaving his safe and peaceful life with his family and returning to his country; He says he doesn't have to, and he can live happily in both countries. Ahmet states that his longing for his family has come to an end and he feels himself in a safe environment. The only thing that matters to him now is the future of his siblings. It is Ahmet's biggest dream to create an environment where they can get a good education.

**MUHAMMED EL-MURAI**

*“The homeland is like a mother... Who wants another mother?”*

Born in 1995, Muhammed al-Murai lived with his family in Idlib, Syria. His father was a teacher and his mother was a housewife. He had a happy life, everything was fine. He was studying Civil Engineering. The clashes that started between the Syrian government and the opposition in March 2011 spread throughout the country in April. This dire situation turned Muhammed's life upside down. Their homes were bombed, they lost everything they owned. It became impossible for him to continue school. His only solution was to be abandoned, to take refuge in a country where he could receive education. Previously, he decided to seek asylum in Turkey, where his older brother also migrated. After a long and difficult journey, he arrived in Adana. In order to overcome the difficulties of immigration, establish a new order for himself and continue his education, Muhammed had important duties to do. First of all, he had to deal with the language issue. That's why he signed up for the course right away. It was extremely important for him to establish friendships, to talk, to lighten things up a bit, and to adapt to the new life. His only goal was to study and get a job where he could earn a living.

Initially, he enrolled in the Department of Transportation Engineering at Karabuk University. He is currently continuing his education; he says he is very satisfied with his school life. He gets along well with his friends and teachers. He also works in a cafe. Despite the low wage he earns, he has to work because he has no other income. Muhammed believes that his difficulties are a life experience and this is how he consoles himself. He misses his family, whom he left in Afrin, and dreams of reuniting with them.

Muhammed says that on August 10, 2019, their house was bombed and that he lost his father in the attack. He believes that one day the war will end: he is waiting for the day when Assad will leave, the war will end and everything will return to normal. *“Homeland... Homeland is like my mother... Who would want another mother?”* he concludes his words.

## **MUHAMMED CUHADAR**

Muhammed was born in Syria in 1992. He lived in the city of Homs before the civil war broke out in his country. They had a shop in the city

where they lived before the war and a nice house where they lived happily ever after. Their financial condition was good. But they suddenly found themselves in the middle of the war that ravaged their lives. All they could do was run away. They decided to leave everything they had in Syria and embark on a long and arduous journey. For Muhammed, leaving the country was as dangerous as living there. The control of the city they were in was in the hands of the opposition. In order to leave the city, they had to give money to the dissidents or to walk many kilometers. Muhammed, along with his brothers and sisters, had to take the second, more dangerous route. Perhaps he would not forget the ordeal of the two-day journey they had continued on foot for the rest of his life. Innocent people killed, the debris left by the war, desperation and unceasing tears... He had witnessed it all. On the way he walked, 60 people had been killed the day before. Two days later they reached the city of Hamah. The journey wasn't over for them yet. They covered the remaining road in one day by car to reach the Turkish border. Thus, they were able to enter Turkey after a tiring and difficult journey, two days on foot and one day by car.

Muhammed came to Turkey with his brothers, and his mother and father sought asylum in Dubai. Muhammed, whose relatives remained in Syria, went to his country in 2015, saying “maybe there is hope”, but he could not hold on. He returned to Turkey and had to submit to his fate. All he had to do was get an education and establish a new order. He enrolled in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Karabuk University.

Muhammed continues his education in Karabuk. Doesn't work anywhere; He makes a living for himself and his siblings with the money sent by his family. He sees the cultural closeness between the communities, the common life style with the local people, the ease of maintaining his own traditions and beliefs as advantages. He thinks that the biggest problem he has in terms of social cohesion is the language problem. *“I do not find the education I received at the Turkish Teaching Center sufficient in terms of social cohesion, I cannot say with certainty that I have solved the language problem”* he says. Despite everything, he says that he is quite satisfied with his life in Karabuk that the tolerant attitude of both his teachers and schoolmates instilled confidence in him, and he is very happy with this situation. He is undecided whether he will return to his country

after the war is over. Anxiety about the future is one of the biggest question marks in his mind.

## **MUHAMMED**

Muhammed was 30 years old when he came to Turkey after a difficult migration journey that started from Syria. When the war broke out, he

went to Jordan to work in the accounting business. Having always placed education at the center of his life, Muhammed decided to go to Turkey in order to realize this ideal. He left his mother, father and three siblings in Syria and set out for Turkey. Before he set off, he contacted his friends in Turkey and came to Rize on their advice. Here he enrolled in an institution specializing in Islamic sciences. In the environment he was in, he communicated with the people around him by speaking Arabic. Maybe that's why he couldn't learn Turkish as long as he stayed in Rize. Muhammed, who took courses on Islamic sciences for a long time, worked in the accounting business in the organized industrial zone for a short time. Working conditions were heavy and tiring, but this situation opened the door to another adventure for him.

The most important thing for Muhammed was to continue his education: in fact, he was shaping his life and future accordingly. While he was in Rize, he wanted to return to Jordan for a while, but he could not go because the Jordanian government closed the border gates to Syrian citizens. He decided to continue his life in Turkey from now on. Of course, living as an immigrant, adapting to society and making a living is not easy for him.

Unfortunately, a new one has been added to these problems: a strange allergy disease of unknown cause. Sometimes he had to stay in the hospital for days due to sudden attacks. In addition, because he had corneal surgery, his right eye was eighty percent blind. Despite all the difficulties, he continued his education with determination and effort. He already had a bachelor's degree. He researched the relevant departments of universities, and finally decided to do his master's degree in the Department of Statistics of Konya Necmettin Erbakan University.

Of course, he had to have financial income to continue his education without interruption. He could not get any support from his family, but his uncle, who lived in Dubai, tried to help as much as he could. While he was preparing for the postgraduate exams, he researched where he could get scholarships in Turkey. After succeeding in the master's exam, he was entitled to receive a scholarship of 1250 TL by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. He started preparing to move from Rize to Konya, but he had a lot of unanswered questions in his mind. First of all, he was thinking about where he would stay and what kind of environment he would enter. His Turkish was insufficient and he had to

overcome this problem. Despite everything, Muhammed believed that he could overcome the obstacles in front of him. First, he started looking for a place to stay. The dormitory of the Presidency of Religious Affairs was a good option in terms of both being suitable for its budget and an environment in which it could adapt. He settled down in the dormitory, got along well with his roommates, and everything went smoothly. In order to start his master's degree, he had to successfully complete the Turkish language and then the scientific preparation. He went into a hard work process again: he started to learn Turkish on the one hand and to work on the graduate courses he took on the other. He successfully completed the course period and passed the thesis period with an average of 94.5. He successfully completed his master's degree by writing his thesis in English. When he graduated, the scholarship he received from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities was naturally discontinued. He came to Kayseri to work, but could not find a job due to the pandemic that swept the world. Muhammed's primary aim is to continue his education either in another country or in Turkey by enrolling in a doctoral program with an YTB scholarship. Currently, Muhammed shares a house in Kayseri

with eleven Syrian friends. Unfortunately, he has no financial income. He plans to go back to Syria, to his family, if the war ends.

## **REYAN**

*“Homeland is not just where we were born, but where we live, love and relax.”*

Reyan was born in Syria in 2002. He was the only child in his family. When they migrated, they were much younger. Therefore, he did not have the competence to decide for himself in the migration process. Even if he had a choice, he would not have chosen to stay in Syria. Because when he was younger, he heard gunshots and sometimes when he got up in the morning he could see the bullets hitting the balcony.

Reyan's family, thinking about the future of their children, saw the only solution as immigration. His family's aim was actually to go to Europe via Turkey, but when they came to Turkey, they decided to stay here, thinking that it would be better to live together with Muslims. In the family's eyes, Turkey was a very suitable country to continue their traditions.

His family moved to Gaziantep in 2013. Reyan was 11 years old and attended secondary school in Turkey. He was having a lot of trouble because he didn't know Turkish. Since he could not attend the course, he tried to learn Turkish by his own means. His classmates reacted when he spoke Arabic. The memory that upset Reyan the most in Turkey and that he will never forget was that he was warned by his classmate's mother at school.

*“Don't sit next to my daughter, you're Syrian”* said the woman, shamelessly and ignoring the fact that the other person was a child.

After two years in Gaziantep, Reyhan moved to Istanbul with his family. He continued his high school education in Istanbul and his Turkish started to improve gradually. He realized that the more he learned the language, the more he adapted to the environment. Also, the reactions he got when he spoke Arabic were not much. Day by day, his self-confidence grew more and more.

After graduating from high school, Reyhan entered the university exams and started his undergraduate education at a private university in Istanbul. Unfortunately, he could not get a scholarship because he studied at a private university. He states that he is very satisfied with the school environment and the attitude of the teachers towards him. He thinks that Turkey is better than Syria in terms of education. Meanwhile, he never forgets the moment when he was slapped by his teacher as a punishment while he was studying in primary school in Syria. He says that he has not encountered such a situation in secondary education, high school and undergraduate education in Turkey. The only

problem Reyan encounters in his classes is that he does not have sufficient command of Turkish. He believes he can solve this problem with more work.

Establishing a business for himself after graduation is among Reyan's biggest goals. This dream gives him strength. He is undecided about where to open his business, and he does not know whether the war will end and whether the diploma he will receive in Turkey will be valid in his own country. Reyan says: *“Some groups in Turkey want Syrians to return to their countries. There is a stereotype in people's mentality that everyone should live where they were born. However, homeland is not just where we were born, but where we live, love and relax.”*

He doesn't remember much about his life in Syria, but he is aware of the difficulties experienced by those he communicates with. From time to time, he talks to his friends in Syria over the internet. Sometimes he compares his situation to theirs and says:

*“Words are not enough to describe what they are going through right now, I can only say it is very difficult for them.”*

Reyan doesn't want to go back to those dark days when he opened his eyes every morning with the sound of gunfire. He thinks he is very lucky to be able to save his life by escaping the war in his country with his family. He doesn't even compare himself to the people who stay there, who are at home, separated from their mother and father. That's why he's happy with where he lives now and the situation he's in.

## **BESAR EL-FARIS**

Bashar al-Faris was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1995, as the son of a policeman who graduated

from the Faculty of Law and a mother of Turkish origin. He had a happy life with his father, mother and six siblings. He grew up in Syria in a prosperous family with olive groves, lands, houses and cars. Bashar was also a successful student in his school life; was in high school. As life goes on as usual, one morning war broke out in his country, their houses and cars were destroyed. Nothing is ever the same anymore. Realizing that everything had come to an end and he was in the whirlpool of despair, Bashar immigrated to Turkey with his family in 2014. They first came to Gaziantep. After staying there for three days, they went to Izmir. Finally, they came to Karabuk and settled here.

This is how Bashar's immigration life began. He made a living by working in restaurants and bakeries in different provinces. Unfortunately, he did not receive social and economic support from anywhere. He had to deal with great difficulties in Turkey, where he came to escape the war. Here, the attitude of some prejudiced people towards Syrians has given Bashar and people like him a hard time. Bashar describes his sad state of affairs with the following sentences: *“I heard unpleasant statements from people in the bank, on the bus or on the minibus, such as 'look, these Syrians have*

*invaded us'. We have encountered this kind of thing a lot, but we are used to it now."*

Bashar draws attention to another issue that bothers him; *"Sometimes a few Syrians do something bad, and then being 'Syrian' is associated with being criminal. However, not all people are the same. There are too many people like us who came to Turkey out of desperation. If the living conditions were good in Syria, would these people leave their country?"*

Bashar had persevered and endured everything in order not to leave Syria, but when the girl he loved was married to someone else, there was nothing that connected him to Syria anymore. Bashar says the feelings inside him are too fragile to describe to anyone.

He showed determination and made an effort to hold on to life, because he had no other choice, either to get used to it or to return to Syria, where there was no security of life at all. Especially the first year he came to Turkey, he had a lot of difficulties. He had to learn a lot to get used to the environment: the most important issue was the language issue. He was in his last year of high school at the time. While living in Izmir, he both studied and worked. He would start the day at

05:00 and study until 07:00, then go to work. As soon as he got off work at 20:00, he would go to English course and return home around 10:00-23:00. It went on like this for a whole year. On the day when the high school graduation exam results were announced, he looked at the result with excitement. It read “*successful*”, but he didn't understand what that word meant. He asked his boss and Bashar was overjoyed when his boss told him that he had passed his exam; He immediately called his mother. His mother burst into tears of happiness. In this situation, Bashar could not help himself, he started to cry with joy. His boss, who witnessed this moment, was also overwhelmed with emotion. This event left a deep impression on Bashar's mind. He continued to follow his dreams and won the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Karabuk University. The fact that he got through all the difficulties and won the university gave Bashar an indescribable happiness. He got along well with his lecturers and friends at school. They were all very good people. After all, he says, “*The way you treat people, they treat you the same way; someone who acts with the idea that if you show respect, you will be respected.*” For this reason, he states that he never lacks respect and love for those around him.

While trying to get his life in order as much as he can, Bashar is heartbroken because of his future concerns. Will he stay in Turkey? Will he return to Syria? What if their dreams don't come true? It is not clear when the war in Syria will end and whether life will return to normal in his country. For now, there is no definite answer to these questions that occupy his mind all the time.

In addition to all these troubles, Bashar is saddened by his father's illness. He wants to graduate as soon as possible, get a job, take care of his family and have his father treated. He even worries about not being able to study the next year because he needs to get a job as soon as possible. While his heart is trying to carry so much weight, he also says that he is very tired of the prejudiced behavior of some people, and he tries to cope with all the troubles. *“Everyone has their own story, history and distress, each person has their own feelings. This is my story”* he concludes.

## **HICRAN**

Imagine a family of seven people who have no problems, no financial difficulties, and are cheered by the sounds of children's games. Hicran was the

daughter of such a family. She is the daughter of a happy and peaceful family living in her own house in Afghanistan... But this peace and happiness gave way to fear with the onset of terror. Hicran and her family became unable to bear the terror of terror. The sounds of children in the streets now gave way to the sounds of guns and bombs. People couldn't get out of the house. It was impossible for a girl to go to school in such an environment. Hicran could not continue her education. Fortunately, she only managed to finish high school, albeit with great difficulty.

There was deep discrimination against women in Afghanistan, which was ravaged by terrorism. Women could not go to school, could not work in any job. Even their coming out was interpreted differently. Hicran has personally experienced these difficulties.

She could no longer hide her sadness. There was nothing in her country that belonged to the concept of freedom. Women were just unlawful people who did and were forced to do housework. Hicran describes her experiences as follows: *“It is difficult to be a woman there. You always have to be veiled. I couldn't work. It was almost impossible for me to get an education. Everyone looks at*

*women in a different way. We experienced such strange and terrible things there.”*

The bloody actions, explosions, shouts and constant crying eyes that she witnessed deeply injured Hicran. The bomb attack in front of her school was the last straw. At that time, Hicran and her siblings were at school. Everyone dispersed to the sound of the bomb exploding with a loud noise. Hicran did not know what to do, it was as if time stopped at that moment. The first thing she did when she regained consciousness was run to her brothers. The explosions reached their house. Hearing the voice, her mother ran to school crying. Fortunately, nothing happened to Hicran and her siblings. Everywhere was like a pool of blood. Her mother immediately drove Hicran and her siblings away, but what she saw was not forgettable. Hicran's family decided to emigrate, they sold their two houses and moved to her grandmother's house for a while. In 2016, they were able to go as far as Iran with the money they had. Their aim was to go to Europe via Iran, but the situation did not turn out as they thought. Passage from Iran to European countries or any other country was not allowed. They couldn't come back after they had come this far and sold everything they had. They could not go back into the war and live without knowing

what would happen tomorrow and what would happen to them. The only solution was to seek asylum in Turkey. So they walked for hours, day and night. After a difficult journey, they entered Turkey. First they stayed in Ankara for three months, then they were sent to Afyonkarahisar. The family was satisfied with the living conditions here. After all the oppression and violence in their country, the free and safe life in Turkey was an invaluable blessing for them. When Hicran went out into the street or went to another place, she no longer met the eyes that looked at her strangely. In addition, there was no situation that would prevent her from getting an education. This environment enabled them to embrace the future with hope. Hicran first took the Foreign Student Exam and won Afyon Kocatepe University. Hicran, who is currently about to complete her first year at the university, is very happy to have a job in the future. The only problem of the family is financial difficulties. Despite the fact that four people work in a family of seven, financial difficulties still do not end. However, they once lived in their own homes without any financial difficulties. That's why they miss the old days.

Hicran is reluctant to return to Afghanistan. She states that she lacks such a life in her

homeland. Now she is both studying here and earning her pocket money with the money she earns in a small business. Despite all kinds of difficulties, Hicran finds the freedom she has so precious that nothing in life can be compared; she says freedom is an indispensable condition for a beautiful future.

## **YUSUF**

Yusuf<sup>24</sup> was born 26 years ago in Afghanistan. His father was a general who fought hand to hand

---

<sup>24</sup> Since the interviewee did not want to share his name, the name “Yusuf” was used in the story.

with the enemy for Afghanistan. Moreover, he was a soldier who served as a commander in the Afghan-Soviet war. Very impressed by his father's life story, Yusuf wanted to be a strong soldier like his father when he grew up. His emigration story began with this desire. The events he witnessed were the most important factor pushing Yusuf to emigrate.

Yusuf; he loves to read, write and learn. Ever since he was little, he was always appreciated as a successful student in the schools he attended. Many of his teachers said he would do well; but others excluded Yusuf because of his origin and his father's profession. Because he is originally Uzbek; Pashtun has always been marginalized by Hazara and Persians. Yusuf describes this discrimination he experienced as follows:

*“Afghan is a nation made up of different races. Pashtuns, Persians, Uzbeks and Hazaras et al. We were discriminated against in schools because we were Uzbek. They always put obstacles in front of us, we didn't get much that was our right. If Persians are in the majority in a region, only Persians can rise there. If there are Uzbeks in another region, only Uzbeks can rise there. I have*

*lived in many parts of Afghanistan. That's why I've always faced discrimination since I was little.”*

Because of his father's profession, Yusuf and his family lived in different regions and faced discrimination everywhere. His father was only fighting for his country, but people outside did not like soldiers because of what happened. Despite everything, Yusuf was always proud of his father and grew up to be a fan of him. While his older brother was still in his mother's arms, his father was at war at the front. His father intervened and mediated in the problems between the regions. Peace in many regions was the direct result of his services. Yusuf says:

*“My father had united seven different villages in four marriages in total and organized a stronger struggle against the Soviets. The main reason for these marriages was to make peace between the villages, to advance faster against the Soviet forces and to defeat the enemy. My father held very important positions in Afghanistan. Because he is a person who has struggled by increasing the army of 300 to 3000 and then to 30,000. He has always been successful in his military life.”*

When the war in Afghanistan ended, Taliban terrorism emerged and completely devastated the

country. This also affected the economy. Hunger and misery began to deepen. Yusuf describes his experiences as follows:

*“When I was going to school in the seventh grade, I used to fill my stomach by dipping dry bread in water in the morning. I can never forget this. I’m 12 or 13 years old, I only had one pair of pants to go to school and I didn’t have the luxury of dirtying it. I don’t know what I would wear if I got it dirty? We had such a troubled life that we could not pay for the bread we bought from the market.”*

Taliban terrorism has not only destroyed the economy, it has committed bloody murders everywhere and established an order of violence and fear. Since his father was a general, Yusuf listened to events and developments at first hand. The Taliban wanted to establish dominance in the region where he lived and offered cooperation by calling his father personally. Yusuf relates this event as he heard it from his father:

*“Before the Taliban, everyone in our region was treated equally, regardless of the difference between men and women. The commanders had an active role in the administration, and each commander ruled the region under his*

*responsibility without allowing any turmoil. It was a guarantee to ensure social peace that a reliable person was at the head and treated the people fairly. That's why the Taliban could not enter our region. The people of the region were also behind their commanders. During the attack on the Twin Towers in America, the Taliban organization called my father and said, NATO, together with America, will come here and recommend people who are dissatisfied with America. You are one of those people. That's why we have to act together and take care of ourselves. If you want, we can fight against them together. My father said, 'I have not made an alliance with you until now and I will not. He harshly rejected the Taliban's offer of cooperation, saying, we will do whatever the people of Afghanistan want.'*

After these developments, the Taliban soon became a major terrorist organization that increased its influence everywhere. People were no longer going out on the streets. Still with fear and excitement, Yusuf relates an event he witnessed while walking on the street one day, his voice trembling:

*“The car with more than one soldier suddenly stopped on the road. They opened the back of the*

*truck and the bodies of the 14-15 year olds were unloaded. All of them were martyred. His trousers and clothes were all covered in blood. One of them had no arms, the other had no legs, and there were even those whose heads were separated from their bodies. I was shocked where I was at that moment, what I saw stuck in my mind for weeks.”*

When Yusuf was only 16 years old, he heard a big explosion one day. It was time for his brothers to leave school. He got on his bike in a hurry and went to school. The explosion took place right in front of the school where his brothers attended. Luckily, nothing happened because the children left school late. If this explosion had coincided with the students leaving school, hundreds of children would have died there that day.

Witnessing major events at a young age, Yusuf drew a future for himself by gaining experience from his experiences, and embraced his books more. He loved to read, but he was aware that this would not be possible in his country. Whatever he had to do, he had to study in another country. His biggest supporter in this regard was his father. After all, his father always encouraged his children to read and improve themselves. In all

the turmoil and war, it is not that you will “*fight*” by giving arms to Yusuf and his brothers, on the contrary, you should always “*read*” and “*This country needs educated people*” he said.

Yusuf took the Turkish Military Academy exam in 2012. The painful days of his life were probably coming to an end. His dreams would come true; He would become an officer, then raise his rank to become a commander like his father. But unfortunately, he was not able to pass the interview and was eliminated. He continued on his way, saying to himself, “*I will not be hopeless, there are many things I can do, and I can even resort to illegal means if necessary.*” It was not easy to come, and the adventures of life after coming to Turkey were never lacking. For about six months, he struggled with financial difficulties, poverty and livelihood problems. He had nothing in his small bag, which he took with his when he left the house, except for two pants and a pair of shoes on his feet. It was extremely difficult for him to communicate with his family. A little help from his older brother wasn't enough to make up for all this trouble. Despite everything, Yusuf thought that nothing could stand in the way of perseverance, the language problem was solved, and he took the Foreign Student Exam and won the

Afyon Kocatepe University Department of Finance. He both studied and worked throughout his university life. In addition, he gave private lessons in English and Arabic to children. Although he applied for a scholarship throughout his education life, he could not get a scholarship from anywhere. Since he was a successful student, the 300 TL scholarship support given by his teachers was extremely important and meaningful for Yusuf. Despite all the difficulties, he successfully finished his school. He is currently studying for a master's degree in finance at the same university.

For Yusuf, returning to Afghanistan means the destruction of his gains in Turkey. The people of Afghanistan still live in harsh conditions. He says that if he returns to his country one day, he will take his experience and knowledge there and act like Turkish youth. Expressing that he is pleased to be in Turkey and receive education at every opportunity, Yusuf is trying to achieve his goals and to finish his master's degree with the money he earns from the private lessons he gives.